NATION

Ayushman insurance cover may be doubled

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Market sees biggest crash since June 2022, investors lose Rs 5L cr

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SPORTS

India beat Afghanistan in 2nd Super Over, sweep series 3-0

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Ahead of polls, PM woos Kerala

PM launched projects worth ₹4Kcr in Kochi

KOCHI, 17 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated projects worth Rs 4,000 crore to the nation on Wednesday. This includes key strategic initiatives at Cochin Shipyard Limited, and said these would help speed up development of the southern region of the country.

Modi after attending the wedding ceremony of actor-turned-politician Suresh Gopi's daughter at the Lord Krishna Temple in nearby Guruvayur, offered prayers at the Sree Ramaswamy temple situated on the bank of the Karuvannur river, also known as Theevra river.

The projects comprise a 310m-long dry dock, constructed to international standards, and the International Ship Repair Facility (ISRF), India's first fully developed pure ship repair ecosystem. Additionally, the dedication includes the IOCL's LPG import terminal.

Modi said that his government was working to make India a major maritime power.

To achieve that goal, the Central government was working to improve infrastructure, capacity, efficiency and connectivity at port cities like Kochi through initiatives like Sagarmala Pariyojanag, he said.

In the past, India thrived with significant global GDP contributions, powered by strong ports and port cities, he said.

The Prime Minister also said that today, as India reclaims its position in global trade, "we're actively fortifying our maritime capabilities". He also highlighted that earlier ships used to queue up in ports for days on end to offload cargo, but now India has surpassed many developed nations in the ship turnaround time. The Central government anticipates that with the dedication of these projects, Cochin Shipyard Limited is poised to double its turnover within the next four years to Rs 7,000 crore.

Modi said that BJP was the only party in India with a proven track record of speedy development and a clear vision for the future.

—PTI

Narendra Modi at the wedding of Suresh Gopi's daughter
PHOTO: @THESURESHGOPI/X

Modi to visit K'taka on 19 Jan

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone and inaugurate projects worth more than Rs 10,800 crore in the State.

He will also inaugurate American aircraft manufacturer Boeing's new state-of-the-art global engineering and technology innovation campus in Devanahalli.

Modi will also distribute title deeds in Malkhed district to eligible beneficiaries of newly-declared revenue villages and lay the foundation stone for a national highway project.

He will lay the foundation stone of Yadgiri multi-village drinking water supply scheme under Jal Jeevan Mission in Kodekal.

During the programme, Modi will also inaugurate Narayanpur Left Bank Canal--Extension Renovation and Modernisation Project. The project, with canal carrying capacity of 10,000 cusecs, can irrigate 4.5 lakh hectares of command area. Modi will also lay the foundation stone of the 65.5 km section of NH-150C. This six-lane Greenfield road project is part of Surat--Chennai Expressway. Modi is also likely to conduct a road show. BJP Lok Sabha meeting scheduled on 19 January has been postponed due to the visit too

The traffic restrictions will be imposed from 19 January 8am to 6pm. All commuters should use alternative route from Bengaluru-Ballari Road to reach the airport.

—Salar News

Cutout of Lord Ram and Narendra Modi on West of Chord Road in Bengaluru
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

RaGa says PM neglecting NE

He says PM did nothing about Naga political row

KOHIMA, 17 JAN

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, accusing him of doing nothing to bring about a solution to the Naga political issue for nine years after the Framework Agreement was signed in 2015.

Addressing a public rally during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra led by him at Nagaland's Mokokchung town, Gandhi said a solution to the problem cannot be brought without having the trust of the Naga people, and without a discussion with them.

Attacking the prime minister, he said, "If you don't have a solution, you should not lie and say you have a solution. You can say that we have to work towards the solution and we will work towards the solution but you must not lie to the Naga people."

He said that Congress understands that the issue is serious and a solution is required.

Referring to the Framework Agreement, the former Congress president said, "What the Prime Minister promised nine years ago is an empty vow to the Naga people."

During a press conference at Chiephobozou on Tuesday, Gandhi asserted his party is committed to a solution to the decades-old Naga Political Issue. The Naga insurgency began in 1947. To find a solution to the decades-old problem, the Centre has been holding separate negotiations with NSCN-IM since 1997 and the Working Committee of Naga National Political Group (NNPG), comprising at least seven groups, since 2017.

The Modi government inked a Framework Agreement with NSCN-IM in 2015 and Agreed Position withPGs in 2017. After travelling almost 180 km from Khuzama village in Kohima district to Mokokchung by road, Gandhi said he observed the bumpy road condition and the erratic power supply. He said, "How can young Nagas compete with the rest of the young people in the country who have better facilities? It is a betrayal to the people of Nagaland. How can we expect to bring a positive future to the people of Nagaland with these roads?"

—PTI

Rahul Gandhi with supporters during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, in Mokokchung, Nagaland on Wednesday
PHOTO: PTI

IndiGo fined ₹1.2 cr over flyers having food on tarmac

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

The Ministry of Civil Aviation's Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) imposed a fine of Rs 1.20 crore on IndiGo over an incident wherein passengers were spotted having food on the tarmac at the Mumbai airport. Meanwhile, Aviation regulator DGCA on Wednesday slapped a fine of Rs 30 lakh each on Air India and SpiceJet for lapses in rostering of pilots for operating flights in low visibility conditions. After analysing the flight delay/cancellation/diversion-related data submitted by scheduled airlines for December 2023, DGCA found that Air India and SpiceJet did not roster "CAT II/III and LVTO qualified pilots for some of the flights," an official said.CAT II/III pertains to operating flights in low visibility conditions. LVTO refers to Low Visibility take-off. Earlier this month, DGCA had issued show cause notices to Air India and SpiceJet for not deploying pilots trained to operate in low visibility conditions.

—PTI

FCRA registration of Centre for Policy Research cancelled

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

The government has cancelled the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) registration of prominent public think-tank, Centre for Policy Research for alleged violation of laws, officials said on Wednesday. The move came nearly a year after the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had suspended the NGO's registration under the FCRA. The think-tank was under scrutiny after surveys carried out by the Income Tax department. The MHA has cancelled the FCRA registration of the NGO for alleged violations of the provisions of the foreign funding law. FCRA licence was suspended in February 2023 for 180 days and then the suspension was extended for another 180 days. ***—PTI***

WEF MEET

K'taka signs MoUs worth Rs 22K cr

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Karnataka government said on Wednesday it has signed MoUs with investment proposals to the tune of Rs 22,000 crore with seven companies at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos.

As part of the MoUs signed on Tuesday, Web Werks proposes to set up a Rs 20,000 crore data centre park in the State, while four other companies plan to invest a total of Rs 2,000 crore, according to a statement issued by the Karnataka Minister for Large and Medium Industries and Infrastructure Development MB Patil.

MB Patil at WEF meet
PHOTO: X

A delegation from the state, headed by Patil, engaged in a series of deliberations with industry leaders during the WEF Meet 2024 in Switzerland, it said. The Lulu Group is set to venture into food processing in Vijayapura district, with plans to invest Rs 300 crore in a plant dedicated to exports. *—PTI*

VEHICLES RUN OVER BODY; SHOVEL USED TO SCRAPE REMAINS

AGRA, 17 JAN

Agra expressway was witness to a horrific incident as a body lay on the road and vehicles ran over it throughout the night. As a result, the body was smeared on the road. Authorities were forced to use a shovel to remove the body. Police managed to get only a finger from the scene and are now banking on it to identify the victim. Apart from this, a lone show was found at the spot. It is still not known for how long the body was on the road. North India continues to see dense fog and this could have contributed to the tragic incident.

—Salar News

PHOTO: SCREEBGRAB

Moreh gunfight kills 2 as Manipur continues to burn

IMPHAL, 17 JAN

The death toll in the gunfight between state security forces and militants at Moreh in Manipur's Tengnoupal district rose to two after another security personnel was shot dead on Wednesday evening, officials said.

The deceased are Takhellambam Saileshwore hailed from Lamshang in Imphal West district, they said.

Earlier in the day during an ambush near Ima Kondong Lairembi Devi temple, 32-year-old Wangkhem Somorjit, a Manipur Police personnel, died after being hit by bullets. He succumbed to injuries during treatment at Key Location Point (KLP) of Assam Rifles.

Two more Manipur Police personnel were injured in the exchange of fire between security forces and militants, officials added.

Meanwhile, large number of women from Malom in Imphal West district blocked the road to the airport in protest against the killing of the policemen in Moreh.

Spokesperson L Premchand of the Joint Action Committee (JAC) formed in connection with the killing of Somorjit told reporters that "the body of the deceased personnel will not be accepted by the family members till the culprits are arrested and brought to justice." Moreh has been experiencing regular exchanges of fire between security forces and militants over the past few days.

The latest firing incident took place just 48 hours after the arrest of two suspects involved in the killing of a police officer by the state's forces. Meanwhile, CBI has filed a charge-sheet against five people in a case of looting of arms and ammunition from police personnel in May 2023.

—PTI

Two more Manipur Police personnel were injured in the exchange of fire
PHOTO: PTI

SK Layout BDA plots now available

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Almost 15 years after issuing preliminary notification, the applications to get Bengaluru Development Authority (BDA) plots in Shivaram Karanth Layout in north Bengaluru will be accepted from 25 January, BDA Minister DK Shivakumar said here on Wednesday.

Applicants are required to pay an initial deposit of 12.5% of the total amount of the plot within one month of application, while those belonging to Scheduled Caste community have to pay a deposit of 5%. Each plot is valued at Rs 4,900 per square foot. Applications for around 30,000 plots will be accepted online and offline.

Priority for farmers who lost lands

BDA issued a preliminary notification for acquiring 3,069 acres in 17 villages in Shivaram Karanth Layout in 2008 and a total of 18,000 people, including farmers, lost their land to the project. Now, BDA will allot around 30,000 plots in the area with 40% reserved for farmers. After the allocation to farmers, the 4,750 corner plots will be e-auctioned as per law. The remaining will be allotted to people.

Shivakumar said the farmers should be willing to take plots in any direction and should not insist on specific allotment. About 25-30 acres with a road width of 45 feet width have been identified to build a stadium similar to Sree Kanteerava Stadium at Shivaram Karanth Layout, Shivakumar said.

Bengaluru Business Corridor (BBC)

The government on Wednesday also notified that Peripheral Ring Road plan in North Bengaluru will be denotified and now called Benglauru Business Corridor. *—Salar News*

ADANI TAKES FULL CONTROL OF IANS

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Billionaire Gautam Adani's group has raised its stake in the media agency IANS India Pvt Ltd to take full control of the news agency as it consolidates its media presence.

Adani Group had last month picked up a 50.50 per cent stake in IANS and now it has raised the shareholding to 76 per cent with voting rights and to 99.26 per cent without voting rights, according to a regulatory filing. The cash outgo is Rs 5 crore, it said.

"In continuation to our earlier intimation dated 15 December, 2023, we would like to inform that AMG Media Networks Ltd (AMNL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of the company has increased its stake in IANS India Private Limited, by subscribing to fresh shares issued by IANS," Adani Enterprises said.

The allotment of the shares was approved by the board of IANS at its meeting held on 16 January 2024, it said. *—PTI*

SURPASSES VISWANATHAN ANAND

Praggs is now India's No. 1

WIJK AAN ZEE, 17 JAN

Teenaged Indian chess superstar R Praggnanandhaa defeated world champion Ding Liren of China in the fourth round of the Tata Steel Chess Tournament here, a win which also helped him surpass the legendary Viswanathan Anand as the top-rated Indian player.

After the victory late on Tuesday night, the 18-year-old Praggnanandhaa has 2748.3 points as against 2748 of five-time world champion Anand in the FIDE live ratings. The world chess body publishes the ratings at the start of each month.

With the 62-move win with black pieces, Praggnanandhaa became the second Indian after Anand to defeat a reigning world champion in classical chess.

Praggnanandhaa had also beaten Liren at the 2023 Tata Steel tournament.

"That feels good!" Praggnanandhaa said after the win.

He is now third in the standings with 2.5 points in the Masters event.

The teenaged Indian GM has been in good form in recent times, having finished runner-up in the World Cup to Magnus Carlsen last year to qualify for the Candidates tournament to be held in April to identify the challenger to Liren.

The Masters group saw Dutch player Anish Giri emerge as the sole leader heading into the first rest day. Giri's endgame prowess secured him victory against teenaged Indian GM D Gukesh to take him to 3.5 points.

Alireza Firouzja is half a point behind the leader on 3 points.

The third Indian player in the fray, Vidit Santosh Gujrathi was held to a draw by Jorden Van Foreest in round four. He has 2 points from four rounds.

In the fifth round on Thursday, Praggnanandhaa runs into the leader Anish Giri while his compatriots Gukesh and Gujrathi will take on Ian Nepomniachtchi and Max Warmerdam respectively.

—PTI

PHOTO: PTI

SC to hear Sena (UBT) plea against Speaker

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Supreme Court on Wednesday deferred to 22 January the hearing on a plea of the Uddhav Thackeray faction of Shiv Sena against the Maharashtra Assembly Speaker's order declaring the Sena bloc led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde as "real political party" after its split in June 2022.

The plea, which was filed on Monday by the Thackeray faction, was fixed by the apex court registry for hearing by a bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud on 19 January. On 15 January, the Thackeray faction, through lawyer Rohit Sharma, had moved the top court challenging the 10 January decision of the speaker declaring the Sena bloc led by Shinde as the

HC issues notice to Maharashtra Speaker

Bombay High Court on Wednesday issued notice to Maharashtra Speaker Rahul Narwekar and the 14 MLAs of the Uddhav Thackeray group on petitions filed by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena challenging Narwekar's order to not disqualify the lawmakers.

—PTI

2 IAS officers to get best electoral practice award

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Two IAS officers from Karnataka to get the best electoral practice award 2023 on the occasion of National Voters' Day on 25 January. District Election Officer Divya Prabhu GR and Karnataka Commissioner of Commercial Taxes Shikha C will be awarded for the best electoral roll management and election management expenditure. Every year, the central Election Commission gives awards of best electoral practices to officers. Chattisgarh will also be presented with the best performing state award. ReenaBabasahebHangale, IAS, chief electoral officer will receive the award on 25 January. Further on the occasion of National Voters' Day, the officers will be awarded for voters' education and electoral participation, IT initiative, accessible elections and security management. *—Salar News*

Will go to Ram temple one day: Laxmi Hebbalkar

MANGALURU, 17 JAN

The Ram Mandir in Ayodhya belongs to 140 crore Indians and all devotees of Lord Ram can visit the temple, Karnataka Women and Child Development Minister LaxmiHebbalkar said on Wednesday. Addressing reporters at Udupi, the minister expressed her huge faith in Lord Ram and plans to visit the temple one day. She also mentioned making donations for the shrine. She declined to comment on the party's stance on the Ayodhya issue. "I am a devotee of the deity and-celebrate our culture and faith and will go to Ayodhya one day," she said. The state government has responded positively to all festival requests and the Chief Minister has already released Rs 10 crore for the Paryaya. the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister will not be attending due to their preoccupations, the minister said. State Home Minister G Parameshwar will take part in the event. To a question, Hebbalkar said the Congress will win the highest number of seats in the state in the coming Lok Sabha elections. *—PTI*

Apple opens new office in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Apple has inaugurated its first office in Bengaluru making it the second-largest smartphone market globally, especially outside of China. The new office, spanning 15 floors, can accommodate up to 1,200 employees includingdedicated lab space, collaborative areas, wellness facilities, and Caffe Macs. The new office in Bengaluru serves as a hub for various talented teams, covering software engineering, hardware technologies, operations, customer support, and more. The company sees the workspace as a platform to encourage innovation, creativity, and collaboration among its teams. This new addition to Apple's corporate office network in India,marks a significant milestone in the tech giant's 25-year history in the country. Apple has separate offices in Mumbai, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Gurugram. *—Salar News*

1st B'luru-Ayodhya Air India flight delayed by 1 hour

BENGALURU, 17JAN

The first non-stop flight to Ayodhya from Bengaluru by Air India Express commenced on Wednesday. The Bengaluru-Ayodhya will operate three days a week on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday. The flight is scheduled to depart at 7.30 am and land in Ayodhya at 10 am. However, the first flight on Wednesday was delayed by 1 hour and 11 minutes. The travel from Bengaluru to Ayodhya takes 2 hours and 48 minutes. Air India Express along with Bengaluru will operate from Kolkata as well. *—Salar News*

M'rashtra can't apply health scheme in K'taka, says CM

There are 865 border villages that come under this scheme

BELAGAVI, 17 JAN

- Chief Minister Siddaramaiah asked Maharashtra to not implement its Mahatma JyotibaPhule Jan Arogya Yojana (health insurance scheme) in the 865 border villages in Karnataka.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah asked Maharashtra to not implement its Mahatma JyotibaPhule Jan Arogya Yojana (health insurance scheme) in the 865 border villages in Karnataka.

Siddaramaiah speaking in Sangolli village of Bailahongal Taluk in Belagavi said that the Chief Secretary of Karnataka had spoken to his Maharashtra counterpart to stop the implementation.

The villages in dispute include Nipani, Balki, Bidar, and Belagavi (earlier known as Belgaum). In 2022, the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly unanimously passed a resolution to "legally pursue" the inclusion of 865 Marathi-speaking villages of Karnataka in Maharashtra. State Legislative Assembly had also passed a resolution saying that it would not let Maharashtra take its land.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah **PHOTO: PTI**

Siddaramaiah was in Belagavi to inaugurate SangolliRayannaSainik School and Rock Garden..

Speaking at the school inauguration, he said, 65 per cent of the school seats will be allocated for Kannadigas. "Actions have been initiated to allocate 35 per cent of the seats to people of other states. People who join this school will also have a better opportunity to join the Army. The school aims at providing quality education and imbibing patriotism in the children," he said.

Responding to former MLA and his son Dr YathindraSiddaramaiah's remarks that he would remain the Chief Minister for five years, he said, "The party will decide the length of my tenure." *—Salar News*

Elevated highway on Tumakuru Road near Peenya has been closed for four days for repair works in Bengaluru on Wednesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Peenya flyover worsens Bengaluru's traffic woes

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

The closure of Peenya Flyover in the City resulted in bottlenecks on one of the busiest and arterial roads on Wednesday. The flyover, shut down for load testing by the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI), has been inaccessible to traffic since 11 pm on Tuesday and will continue to remain closed until 19 January at 11 pm.

The flyover links 18 districts to the City. The closure created huge traffic jams on in Nelamangala, Dasarahalli, and Jalahalli Cross among other adjoining areas.

Meanwhile, traffic police ensured the smooth passage of ambulances operating on this stretch.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Siri Gowri said, "We request the commuters to avoid these roads. We have deployed staff from Malleswaram, Yeshwanthpur and Peenya police stations as we have asked 30 more police personnel to manage the traffic flow" she said.

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has invested Rs.38.5 crore in repair works including retrofitting measures. NHAI is now evaluating the quality of work through these tests. According to NHAI officials, the decision to allow heavy vehicles on the flyover will be made following road retention checks. *—Salar News*

TECHNICAL ASSISTANT CANDIDATES GET POSTING AFTER 3 YEARS

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

A total of 264 candidates selected for Technical Assistant post in Transport Department, who has been waiting for over three years, was given posting on Wednesday.

The announcement was made at the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) head office here on Wednesday.

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy said the recruitment process, pending for six years, finally came to fruition due to the efforts of Congress government. The candidates applied for the exams in 2018, wrote them in 2019, and faced delays due to the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in a halt in government hiring for three years. After the Congress government assumed power in 2023, they completed the recruitment process within three months and gave the candidates the opportunity to choose depots through computerised counselling. *—Salar News*

Ex-min Madhuswamy eyes Tumakuru ticket

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Former minister and BJP leader JC Madhuswamy has expressed his interest in securing a ticket to contest in the upcoming Lok Sabha election from the Tumakuru constituency. This development follows former minister V Somanna's similar aspirations for the Tumakuru seat, creating intrigue within State BJP.

Somanna, who recently met Union Home Minister Amit Shah, initially sought a Rajya Sabha ticket, but Shah advised him to consider contesting in the Lok Sabha elections. Somanna indicated that he would decide on the Tumakuru ticket after its announcement.

After staying away from party activities since his defeat in the Assembly elections, Somanna's recent interactions with Shah have fuelled speculations that he might demand a Lok Sabha ticket from the High Command.

The subsequent developments post Somanna's discussions with the High Command have sparked expectations among various candidates, notably Madhuswamy, who is eyeing the BJP ticket for the Lok Sabha seat. Reports suggest that former chief minister BS Yeddyurappa has also extended his support to Madhuswamy. On the other hand, the incumbent MP from TumakuruLokSabha constituency, GS Basavaraj, along with several MLAs, has reportedly stood in support of Somanna and opposed Madhuswamy's candidacy. *—Salar News*

Road safety trials underway at Attibele junction

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

An NGO in partnership with the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and Karnataka Police on Wednesday launched a temporary, low-cost intervention to test out road safety strategies at Attibele Junction, to make Bengaluru roads safe for all. Known as a Tactical Urbanism (TU) Trial, this is the third such activity undertaken in Bengaluru, the NGO said.

According to the NGO SaveLIFE Foundation, Karnataka State Police recorded 32 road accidents, including 10 fatalities, within a 1 km radius of the intersection between 2020 and 2022. *—Salar News*

BJP hits back at Siddaramaiah over memes on Modi

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is an editing master as he lies, deceives people and creates fake news, BJP said on X on Wednesday.

Responding to Siddaramaiah's posting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's AI-generated memes of him sleeping with the caption, "Prime Minister's deep sleep is the reason for Karnataka's lack of development."

Leader of Opposition, R Ashoka said, "CM @siddaramaiah Take a chill pill. If you think you can impress your high command and save your CM chair by such a rant and rave against PM @narendramodi Ji, then you are living in a fool's paradise. It is no longer a secret that your days are numbered and you will be shown the exit door after Lok Sabha Elections. So, take a chill pill. Keep Calm and Trust Modi."

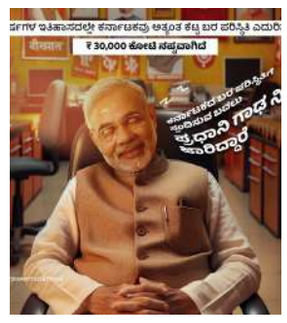


PHOTO: X/ SIDDARAMAIAH

Former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai said, "Working for the country eighteen hours a day for nine and a half years without taking a single day off, our Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi a hard worker, and a true patriot, has made a record development in the history of India, and it seems that he has woken up from his deep sleep @siddaramaiah which is said to be a deep sleep."

Taking a dig at the Siddaramaiah government's works, BJP said CM was sleeping when State was reeling under critical issues such as drought-hit farmers, diversion of Cauvery water, crimes against women and grants to Hindu temples. But, Siddaramaiah wakes up from sleep only to give Rs 10,000 crore grant to minorities, let PFI goons off the hook, let out gang rapists and let girls wear hijabs in schools. *—Salar News*

₹26 CR TO BE SPENT

Venkatappa art gallery to get a swanky look

VAISHNAVI GOPALRAJ
BENGALURU, 17 JAN

The historic Venkatappa Art Gallery in Bengaluru is undergoing a renovation by keeping the skeletal structure of the building intact and incorporating elements of modern architecture.

The renovation of the 60-year-old structure by Karnataka Tourism Department comes after years of neglect with many artists advocating for expanding the gallery and better management of the institution.

The renovation is estimated to cost around Rs 26 crore and is expected to be completed within 8-9 months, before Dussehra (October 2024). The new museum will have 236 new paintings and artworks on Plaster of Paris by renowned artist Venkatappa.

The newly renovated gallery will display the oldest Halmidi inscription in India and Wadiyaar textiles and puppets. Also, new storages will be designed for efficient space management to showcase around 9,000 artefacts across 22 diverse categories.

The renovation is expected to be completed within 8-9 months **PHOTO: SALAR**

To enhance the visitors' experience, the authorities are planning to introduce audio and visual guides for each display. Additionally, interactive installations for each display category are in the works, aiming to engage students and youngsters effectively.

Tourism Minister HK Patil expressed delight at the restoration, following a memorandum of understanding with Brigade Foundation.

The revamped space seeks to transcend local boundaries, offering a comprehensive collection from the Ashoka era to the Vijayanagara period, highlighting Karnataka's rich historical legacy.

The minister said, "We aim to renovate all the government museums within 2 years and give a new look to it."

The art lovers in the City are waiting for this old charm to be restored so that the artists will have a new home to discuss everything about the art. The renovated museum will also offer a platform for an artists' collective in Bengaluru to showcase their works with the concept of 'pick whatever and pay whatever'.

Mariam Gorege, an artist from the City who is constantly looking for spaces to put out artworks of her group, said: "We are excited at the renovation as it will offer us an opportunity to put up artworks of our generation along with the traditional ones in the gallery," she said.

Why is it being renovated

Department of Tourism has taken note of the substandard condition of the building and inadequate space in the museum. Karnataka Tourism Infrastructure Limited (KTIL) has been entrusted with the responsibility of upgrading, conserving and curating the museum. Space constraints are a major concern at the gallery.

Out of the 22 categories of objects in the museum, only eight had been showcased in the gallery. Around 50% of the artefacts had been relegated to storage due to unappealing display methods and inadequate security measures. Venkatappa Art Gallery was launched in 1975 and has been a venue for numerous group shows, Kala Melas, international art festivals, and public art presentations.*—Salar News*

'LS POLL EXECUTION CAN ENSURE 5-YEAR TERM FOR CM'

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

A good show by the ruling Congress in the upcoming Karnataka Lok Sabha elections would enable Siddaramaiah to continue as Chief Minister for a full term of five years without any hindrance, his son Yathindra said on Wednesday.

This statement has led to a debate on the controversial leadership issue.

After the Congress swept the Assembly elections in May last year, Siddaramaiah, who in a stiff competition with senior party leader DK Shivakumar for the Chief Minister's post, was chosen to lead the government. Shivakumar was made the lone deputy Chief Minister and remained the President of Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee. Rumours spread within the party about a power-sharing deal made, in which Shivakumar would take over the reins from Siddaramaiah after two-and-half-years.

No official confirmation has been made and speculations over the leadership issue continues.

Speaking at a function in the district headquarters town of Hassan, Yathindra appealed to the people to continue their support to Siddaramaiah.

"In that election, under Siddaramaiah's leadership, if we win a maximum number of seats, we will gain moral support (strength)," the former MLA said. *—PTI*

HC FINES GOVT RS 5 LAKH FOR DEFYING ORDER

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Karnataka High Court has fined the state government of Rs five lakh for not complying a court order for over three years. The division bench of Chief Justice Prasanna B Varale and Justice Krishna S Dixit addressed a civil contempt of court petition.

The petition alleged that the State failed to follow a three-and-half-year-old HC order directing the government to implement wage parity between government and govt-aided edu institutions. The court rejected the contention of the government advocate seeking two weeks to implement the court's earlier order. *—PTI*

VOICES OF YOUTH

People's Forum for Karnataka Education said that they collected opinions from 2,88,178 students **PHOTO: SALAR**

Students want govt to junk SEP, not NEP

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

A large number of students in the State have urged the government to implement the New Education Policy (NEP) and reject the State Education Policy(SEP). Addressing media at the press club in the City, Mallepuram G Venkatesh, the convener of People's Forum for Karnataka Education in Bengaluru, said, "In the past year, we conducted campaigns across the State, visiting around 2,630 schools and colleges. We gathered opinions from around 86,600 teachers and 2,88,178 students in our research paper. Additionally, we collected opinions from 26,980 parents and others who have signed our research paper. In total, 10,16,000 people across the State are urging the continuation of NEP-2020."

"Campaigns organised by educationists reached all districts, creating widespread public awareness. A rally supporting NEP-2020 saw participation from teachers, students, and the general public, demonstrating the success of these awareness programs." he added.

Former vice-chancellor of Bangalore University, Venugopal KR, said, "The four-year undergraduate degree is up to the student's choice. NEP-2020 has made it clear that students who want to engage in research or intensively prepare themselves for employment, enrol in foreign or Indian universities for higher studies can opt for this honours degree. Elsewhere, the policy clearly states that students can opt for a regular three-year degree. We are not restricting the students. It depends on them to go for a 3-year degree course or a four-year course."

He further highlighted, "As NEP provides education through technology, yearly one exam burdens the students; hence NEP keeps it based on assessment. NEP is planned to implement artificial intelligence for providing education, which is an advanced one. Opting for NEP would be a boon for this State." *—Salar News*

Akhilesh Yadav 'unlikely' to join Bharat Nyay Yatra

LUCKNOW, 17 JAN

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday said he is "unlikely" to join Congress' "Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra" led by Rahul Gandhi. When asked about this at a press conference at the party office here, Yadav said, "Neither the Congress nor the BJP invites us to their programmes." Yadav, who flagged off "Samvidhan Bachao, Desh Bachao Samajwadi PDA Yatra" from the party office here, said that the yatra will spread the ideologies of Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar, Dr Ram Manohar Lohia and Mulayam Singh Yadav down to the villages. PDA stand for Pichada, Dalit, Alpsankhyak-Muslims (backward, Dalits and minorities, especially Muslims) "We have taken a pledge to fulfil dreams of old socialists and the yatra will cover many districts of the state. It will attempt to unite backwards, Dalits, minorities and also upper castes," he said, adding that SP was the only party which was fighting to save constitutional values and the constitution. *—PTI*

Manipur seeks helicopters from MHA

IMPHAL, 17 JAN

The Manipur government has requested the Ministry of Home Affairs for helicopters from Wednesday to meet emergency requirements in the wake of law and order situation in the border town of Moreh, an official said. Commissioner Home T Ranjit Singh in a letter to Additional Secretary (Police II Division), Ministry of Home Affairs, said: "The law and order situation in the border town of Moreh has become a matter of serious concern as there has been continuous exchange of fire and this has resulted in the death of one IRB personnel this morning." "In view of the prevalent situation in Moreh, medical emergency may arise anytime", the letter stated. The Manipur government has requested for helicopters from MHA for at least seven days as Moreh town witnessed heavy exchange of fire between security forces and suspected Kuki militants armed with sophisticated weapons at more than three different locations on Wednesday morning. *—PTI*

Weather in Meghalaya delays Murmu's departure

SHILLONG, 17 JAN

President Droupadi Murmu was reportedly stuck here for over four hours on Wednesday, as her helicopter could not take off due to bad weather, officials said. Murmu was scheduled to depart from Shillong for Diphu in Assam at 10 am, they said. "The president is due to leave the Raj Bhavan in another 10 minutes. She was delayed owing to bad weather," a senior official told PTI around 2.35pm. Murmu is scheduled to attend a programme organised by the Karbi Anglong administration in Diphu. She was on a two-day maiden visit to Meghalaya. *—PTI*

ED questions ex-Haryana CM in laundering case

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Former Haryana chief minister and senior Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda was questioned by the ED on Wednesday. The Enforcement Directorate probe pertains to "illegal" acquisition of land in Haryana's Manesar between 2004 and 2007 with the alleged connivance of senior government functionaries and bureaucrats, official sources said. The agency recorded the statement of the 76-year-old Hooda under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), they said. Many farmers and land owners had alleged that they had been cheated to the tune of about Rs 1,500cr in this land acquisition case. The agency had filed a PMLA case in the alleged land scam deal in September, 2016 on the basis of a Haryana Police FIR. The CBI is also investigating the case. *—PTI*

BJP-Cong-AAP engage in fisticuffs in C'garh

AAP contests for the post of mayor, Cong for senior Dy mayor

CHANDIGARH, 17 JAN

A big fight broke out between the BJP and Congress-AAP workers at the municipal corporation office in Chandigarh on Tuesday ahead of the Chandigarh mayoral polls. It incident took place when Congress municipal councillor Jasbir Singh Bunty came to withdraw his nomination papers from the post of mayor.

Bunty's father, asked the Congress leaders to send his son with him, alleging that he had been kidnapped. A big fight took place between the workers of the Congress-AAP and those of the BJP.Congress accused Bunty's father of levelling allegations under the influence of the BJP. Later, the Chandigarh police took Bunty to his residence. Jasbir Singh Bunty was initially the Congress candidate for the post of mayor. But after the Congress and the AAP sealed an alliance for the mayoral posts, a decision was taken that the AAP will fight for the post of mayor and the Congress nominees will fight for the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor.

Congress-AAP, BJP workers fight over nomination withdrawal on Wednesday *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

Later, Bunty, in a video message, said he was with the Congress and will remain with it. Senior Congress leader Pawan Kumar Bansal accused the BJP of misusing the local administration to poach leaders of the opposition parties. AAP and the Congress forged an alliance on Monday for the upcoming Chandigarh mayoral polls.AAP will fight for the mayor's seat while the Congress will contest the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor. In the 35-member Chandigarh Municipal Corporation, the BJP has 14 councillors. It has an ex-officio member MP who has voting rights.It has 13 councillors and the Congress seven. The Shiromani Akali Dal has one councillor in the House. Polls for the posts of mayor, senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor will be held on Thursday. *—PTI*

No hate speeches at rallies: SC to states

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the District Magistrates and Superintendents of Police of Maharashtra's Yavatmal and Chhattisgarh's Raipur to ensure no hate speeches are made at rallies being held by Hindu Janajagruti Samiti and Telangana BJP legislator T Raja Singh over the next one week in their respective jurisdictions.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta, however, refused to stay the rallies, saying the parties the applicant has voiced apprehensions about are not before the court. It advised the DMs and SPs of the two districts to install CCTV cameras at the venue of the proposed rallies with recording facility so that those making hate speeches can be identified, in case they deliver one.Court asked the authorities to be

PHOTO: PTI

cautious and ensure there is no incitement to violence. "We accordingly direct the District Magistrate, Superintendent of Police of Yavatmal, Maharashtra and Raipur, Chhattisgarh to take notice of the allegations and take appropriate steps as required. If necessary and deemed appropriate, police will install CCTV cameras with recording facilities so that perpetrators can be identified, if anything happens," the bench said in its order.It passed the order on an application moved in the pending plea of journalist Shaheen Abdulla highlighting instances of hate speech at such events. Abdulla said in his application that Hindu Janajagruti Samiti is scheduled to hold a rally in Yavatmal on 18 January and voiced apprehension about hate speeches being made there. He said controversial BJP MLA from Telangana T Raja Singh is set to address rallies in Raipur, the Chhattisgarh capital, from 19 January to 25 January. He feared hate speeches might be made at Singh's rallies, too.Senior advocate Kapil Sibal and lawyer Nizam Pasha, who appeared for Abdulla, contended during the hearing that no action was being taken against those promoting hate through their speeches. "We have gone through the petition and there are certainly objectionable remarks which have been made. But some action has been taken and they (police) have lodged FIR," Justice Khanna said. *—PTI*

SC reserves verdict on AAP leader Satyendar Jain's plea

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Supreme Court on Wednesday reserved its verdict on the regular bail plea of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Satyendar Jain in a money laundering case.

A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal reserved its judgment after hearing the arguments of senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Jain, and Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, representing the Enforcement Directorate(ED).

On 14 December, 2023, the top court had extended till 8 January the interim bail granted to Jain, a former minister in the AAP government, in the case on medical grounds.

Supreme Court had granted interim bail to Jain on 26 May, 2023, on medical grounds and it has been extended from time to time. Jain has moved the apex court challenging the 6 April, 2023 order of the Delhi High Court dismissing his regular bail application in the case.

Satyendar Jain *PHOTO: PTI*

- ED had arrested the AAP leader on 30 May, 2022, on the charge of laundering money through four companies allegedly linked to him.He was on the basis of a CBI FIR registered against him in 2017 under the Prevention of Corruption Act

ED had arrested the AAP leader on 30 May, 2022, on the charge of laundering money through four companies allegedly linked to him.

The ED had arrested Jain on the basis of a CBI FIR registered against him in 2017 under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Jain, who has denied these allegations, was granted regular bail by the trial court on 6 September, 2019, in the case registered by the CBI. *—PTI*

MODI IN KERALA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with artists who performed 'Malayalam Ramayan' at Triprayar Sree Ramaswamy Temple, in Thrissur district, Kerala on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Cong to seek suggestions for LS poll manifesto

PHOTO: PTI

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Congress launched a website and an email ID on Wednesday, inviting suggestions from the public for its manifesto for this year's Lok Sabha polls.

Addressing a press conference here, P Chidambaram, who heads the Manifesto Committee of the Congress, said the party is holding consultations and seeking suggestions from the public for the manifesto. He said the manifesto for the Lok Sabha election will be a "people's manifesto". "The present exercise is to receive suggestions from the members of the public. So it is important to gather as many suggestions as possible in the few weeks available to us," Chidambaram said.He said at least one consultation will be held in each state. "The idea is to hold at least one consultation in each state. In some states, more than one public consultations may be held," he said. Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinate said the suggestions can be given on the website -- awaazbharatki.in-or by emailing to awaazbharatki@inc.in. Convenor of the party's Manifesto Committee TS Singh Deo said the exercise is being carried out to ensure that the voice of people is reflected in the document. *—PTI*

T'gana Cong names candidates for bypoll

HYDERABAD, 17 JAN

The AICC on Wednesday announced Mahesh Kumar Goud Bomma and Venkat Narsing Rao Balmoor as Congress candidates for the January 29 byelection to the Telangana Legislative Council.

Members of the legislative council are elected by MLAs.

The two seats in the legislative council fell vacant after BRS MLCs Kadiyam Srihari and P Kowshik Reddy resigned when they got elected to the legislative assembly in the recent polls.

"Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has approved the proposal for the candidature of the following persons as Congress candidates to contest the byelections to the Legislative Council of Telangana to be elected by the MLAs. 1. Mahesh Kumar Goud Bomma, 2. Venkat Narsing Rao Balmoor," AICC General Secretary K C Venugopal said in a release.

While Mahesh Kumar Goud is the working president of the state Congress, Venkat Balmoor, a medical doctor, is the president of NSUI in Telangana.

Mahesh Kumar Goud handled key responsibilities as PCC working president, while Balmoor fought on youth issues like unemployment when BRS was in power till recently.

Congress MP Manickam Tagore, who was AICC in-charge of Telangana earlier, congratulated Mahesh Goud and Venkat Balmoor on social media platform X.

He said that loyalty would always be valued in Congress.

Tagore recalled that Venkat Balmoor had fought and lost the bypoll to Huzurabad assembly seat in 2021 when PCC president Revanth Reddy and CLP leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka had asked him to contest. *—PTI*

JMM workers block roads in J'khand

SAHEBGANJ, 17 JAN

JMM workers took to the streets in Jharkhand's Sahebganj district on Wednesday to enforce the nine-hour district bandh called to protest the Enforcement Directorate (ED) summons to Chief Minister Hemant Soren in connection with a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam.

Raising slogans against central probe agencies, the ruling party workers halted traffic and forced shops to down shutters in various parts of Sahebganj city and other parts of the district including Barhait, the Assembly constituency of the chief minister.

Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren *PHOTO: PTI*

The ED had on 13 January sent a letter to him asking him to be available for questioning in the case between 16 January and 20 January.In reply, Soren told the ED it can record his statement on 20 January.

JMM's Sahebganj district president Shahjahan Ansari claimed that the bandh is being observed peacefully across the district with the cooperation of the people in the district. He said that the bandh has been called from 8 am to 5 pm.Emergency services like ambulance, trains and milk vans have been exempted from the purview of the strike, he said. "Our Barhait MLA and chief minister Hemant Soren formed a full majority government in Jharkhand. But, he is being harassed by the central agencies on the direction of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In protest against this, we are observing bandh today," he said.ED had sent the letter after Soren skipped seven summonses in connection with the case.Investigation pertains to a "huge racket of illegal change of ownership of land by the mafia" in Jharkhand, according to the ED. *—PTI*

India facing debt trap due to Modi's policies: Kharge

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday claimed the country is facing the risk of falling into a debt trap due to the policies of the Modi government and said the truth cannot be hidden behind the noise of "advertising tamashas".

Kharge said the IMF has "warned" the country over its high debt-to-GDP ratio of 81 per cent instead of the acceptable 60 per cent.

"The Modi government will present the last budget of its tenure in 15 days. Some facts - the savings of the country's families are at the lowest level in 50 years. This has fallen to 5.1 per cent of GDP.

"While the total debt of the government (fiscal deficit – central government: 5.9 per cent, State: 3.1 per cent) is estimated to be around 9 per cent."According to this, it is clear that the government alone will have to borrow more than what the families of the country are saving. This is most dangerous," he said in a post in Hindi on X.He said, the Debt to GDP Ratio should be 60 per cent, "but it is currently at 81 per cent, and IMF has also warned on this, which the Modi government has habitually rejected." *—PTI*

RAM TEMPLE CONSECRATION

Ram Temple creates a buzz in Davos too

DAVOS, 17 JAN

The Ayodhya Ram Temple is creating a buzz in this Swiss ski resort town during the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting with devotees planning Ram Bhajans and light diyas on the consecration day this Monday.

Besides, many global business leaders have been inquiring from the Indian delegation, including those from the government and private sector, about the business and infrastructure opportunities created by development of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh as a major religious and tourism centre.

Speaking to PTI on the side-lines of the WEF Annual Meeting 2024, Union Minister Smriti Irani said, "Some Ram Bhakts here asked me to record a message imploring the community here to do Ram Bhajan and to lighten diyas here on 22nd January." "They came to the lounge and saw me here, walked up and they made that request," said Irani who is leading a strong Indian delegation to the WEF. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and several leaders are scheduled to be present at the ceremony in Ayodhya on 22 January, which is likely to be attended by over 8,000 people. Besides the temple, an international airport has also been set up in Ayodhya while a large number of infrastructure projects are being built there to develop the city into a major religious tourism centre. *—PTI*

Prime Minister has urged people across the country to celebrate the day like Diwali at their respective places *PHOTO: X*

They boycotted the new Parliament building and the prime minister's address and people boycotted them. Now, they think they can boycott the pran pratishtha ceremony, but people might boycott them again,

-Anurag Thakur, Union Minister

Kalash pujan at Sarayu banks

AYODHYA, 17 JAN

A "Kalash Pujan" was performed on Wednesday, as part of the pre-ceremony rituals in the run-up to the 22 January consecration at the Ram temple here, a member of the temple's trust said.

The rituals started on Tuesday and will continue till 21 January, as stated by the trust general secretary Champat Rai. On the day of the consecration, only essential rituals for the "Pran Pratishtha" of the idol of Ram Lalla will be conducted, he had said.

The "Kalash Pujan" was done by Sri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust member Anil Mishra, his wife and others on the banks of the Saryu river.

Following this ritual, pots filled with water of the Saryu will be taken to the place (Ram temple complex) where the pre-consecration rituals are being held, according to Mishra. *—PTI*

Pawar, Kejri plan Ram Mandir visits

Nationalist Congress Party president Sharad Pawar and the Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Wednesday that they plan to visit Ayodhya and offer prayers to Lord Ram after the temple construction. Kejriwal also has said that he plans to visit Ayodhya with his family after the 22 January. *—PTI*

Noida school time changed from 18 Jan due to cold

NOIDA, 17 JAN

Classes from nursery to 8 in all schools of Noida and Greater Noida will start at 10 am from January 18 on account of cold weather conditions, officials said on Wednesday. This timing would continue until further orders from the district administration, The officer also called for strict enforcement of the order. Classes nursery to 8 were suspended till 16 January due to the cold weather conditions in the region. While classes were ongoing for students of 9 to 12, their school timings were last week changed to 10 am to 3 pm, according to a separate order issued by District Inspector of Schools Dharmveer Singh. This timing for Classes 9 to 12 will continue till 20 January 20, the order had stated. Government schools in Noida usually follow a 9 am to 3pm schedule in winters.—*PTI*

UP girl who went out to defecate raped

MAHARAJGANJ, 17 JAN

A 14-year-old Dalit girl was allegedly raped by a man from her village here, police said on Wednesday. The incident happened on Monday as the girl went to the field to defecate. The accused Devendra Singh stuffed a cloth in her mouth and raped her. On the complaint of the victim's mother, a case was registered and the accused was arrested, Additional Superintendent of Police (Maharajganj) Atish Kumar Singh said. The accused has been booked under sections of the IPC, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, the official said. Further investigation is underway, he added. —*PTI*

Tiger found dead in MP, 2nd big cat death in a week

Umaria, 17 Jan

A young tiger was found dead in the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR) in Madhya Pradesh's Umaria district, with officials suspecting it was killed by an adult tiger. This is the second death of a feline in BTR within a week. The carcass of the sub-adult tiger, aged between 12 months and 18 months, was spotted in a trench in Dhamokhar range of the BTR on Tuesday on Wednesday. The carcass was about 36 hours old. The pugmark of a second tiger was found in the vicinity, an official said. Marks of the carcass being dragged by another tiger were also found. The forest official said that the neck bone of the carcass was found to be broken and teeth marks were also found there, suggesting that the big cat died in the fight with another tiger. On 9 January, the carcass of a young tiger, aged between 15 months and 18 months, was found lying in a trench in the Pator range of BTR. —*PTI*

Kerala makes Preamble part of school textbooks

T'PURAM, 17 Jan

For the first time in the history of the state, the revised school textbooks in Kerala will include the preamble to the Constitution of the country. The CPI(M)-led Left Government has decided to incorporate the preamble into textbooks of class 1 to 10 as part of its efforts to instil constitutional values in the minds of children, official sources said here on Wednesday. General Education Minister V Sivankutty, who is also the chairman of the State Curriculum Committee, announced the significant decision here yesterday. "It is the first time that the preamble of the Constitution is included and printed at the start of every textbook," Sivankutty said. The minister said the LDF government has made it clear since the beginning that the southern state would pursue reform activities upholding constitutional values. —*PTI*

Ayushman insurance cover may be doubled

Announcement about this will be made in Budget on 1 Feb

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

An announcement about this is likely to be made in the interim Union Budget on 1 February **PHOTO: PTI**

The government is working on finalising a proposal to double the insurance cover under Ayushman Bharat health scheme to Rs 10 lakh.

"This is to ensure that processes such as transplants and high-cost cancer treatments are also covered. The Ministry will also increase the cover amount from Rs 5 lakh per family per year to Rs 10 lakh per family per year from 2024-25 onwards," the sources said.

An announcement about this is likely to be made in the interim Union Budget on 1 February, the sources told PTI.

Union Health Ministry is also planning to double the beneficiaries to 100 crore under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) to include Kisan Samman Nidhi recipients, construction workers, non-coal mine workers and ASHA workers in the next three years.

The increase in coverage to Rs 10 lakh per family per year and increase in beneficiary base to 100 crore individuals will involve cost Rs 12,076 crore per annum, the sources stated.

The budget allocated for Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY for the financial year 2023-24 is Rs 7,200 crore, which is likely to more than double to around Rs 15,000 crore in the financial year 2025.

The scheme has catered to 6.2 crore hospital admissions amounting to more than Rs 79,157 crore till now since 2018.

If the beneficiary had availed the same treatment on his own outside the ambit of AB PM-JAY, the total cost of the treatment would have gone up nearly two times, the official said.

The AB PMJAY crossed the milestone of generating 30 crore Ayushman cards on 12 January.

With 4.83 crore cards, Uttar Pradesh tops the list of states having the maximum Ayushman cards. Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra stand at number two and three positions with 3.78 crore and 2.39 crore Ayushman cards respectively. Eleven states have more than 1 crore Ayushman card holders.

The flagship scheme being implemented by the National Health Authority (NHA) aims to provide health cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation to 12 crore beneficiary families.

Ayushman card creation is the most fundamental activity under Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY and concerted efforts are being made to ensure that every beneficiary under the scheme has an Ayushman card, the Ministry said. —*PTI*

FCRA licence of Centre for Policy Research cancelled

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Centre for Policy Research (CPR) has been one of India's leading public policy think-tanks since 1973 **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

The government has cancelled the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) registration of prominent public think-tank, Centre for Policy Research for alleged violation of laws, officials said on Wednesday.

The move came nearly a year after the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had suspended the NGO's registration under the FCRA. The think-tank was under scrutiny after surveys carried out by the Income Tax department.

The MHA has cancelled the FCRA registration of the NGO for alleged violations of the provisions of the foreign funding law. FCRA licence was suspended in February 2023 for 180 days and then the suspension was extended for another 180 days.

According to its website, the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) has been one of India's leading public policy think-tanks since 1973. It says that it is a non-profit, non-partisan, independent institution dedicated to conducting research that contributes to high quality scholarship, better policies, and a more robust public discourse about issues that impact life in India.

The donors of the CPR included the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Hewlett Foundation, World Bank, Ford Foundation, Brown University besides others, officials said.

The former members of the CPR governing body include former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, former Chief Justice of India late Y V Chandrachud, veteran journalist late B G Verghese.

When the CPR challenged its suspension in the Delhi High Court, the MHA had argued that the CPR's foreign funding needed to be stopped as it was receiving its foreign contributions for "undesirable purposes" likely to affect the country's economic interest.

The MHA alleged that the CPR transferred foreign contributions to other entities and deposited the contributions in non-designated accounts in violation of FCRA.

When contacted, CPR president and Chief Executive Yamini Aiyar said the NGO will soon issue a statement. —*PTI*

Fog cover reduces over parts of North India

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

People walk along railway tracks amid a fog during a cold winter morning at Salarapur in Ayodhya on **PHOTO: PTI**

The layer of early-morning fog over the Indo-Gangetic plains in north India thinned in some parts on Wednesday.

Satellite imagery showed a reduction in fog over Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh, northern Madhya Pradesh and Delhi. However, dense fog continues to prevail over parts of Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

A spokesperson for the Indian Railways said 20 trains arriving in Delhi were delayed by up to five hours due to foggy weather.

At the Palam Observatory near the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport in Delhi, visibility was limited to only 200 metres.

Early-morning foggy weather in north and northeast India has heavily impacted road, rail and air traffic over the last fortnight. On Monday, five flights were diverted and more than 100 delayed at the Delhi airport.

Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Monday that all stakeholders are working round-the-clock to minimise fog-related disruptions.

The Delhi airport was asked to expedite the operationalisation of the CAT III-enabled fourth runway in addition to the existing CAT III-enabled runways.

Generally, CAT III compliance refers to flight operations in low-visibility conditions. As the blinding fog lowered visibility levels at several places on Tuesday night, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) advised people to avoid unnecessary travel and take precautions while driving. —*PTI*

HC takes cognisance of 17 with vision loss after surgery

AHMEDABAD, 17 JAN

Gujarat High Court **PHOTO: PTI**

Gujarat High Court on Wednesday took suo motu cognisance of a media report that 17 individuals complained about vision issues after cataract surgery at a trust-run hospital in Ahmedabad.

High Court deemedthe incident "glaring and deplorable".

The division bench of Justices AS Supehia and Vimal K Vyas issued notices to the Secretary of State Health and Family Welfare epartment and superintendent of police of Ahmedabad Rural, directing them to file a preliminary report by 7 February. "We take suo motu cognisance of the news article published on 17 January since it raises an issue of grave concern which has a direct impact on the well-being of elderly patients who have suffered vision loss," Justice Supehia of the division bench said. The court said the news report does not refer to any criminal complaint filed by the state authorities against the erring medical personnel or any other staff responsible for the incident. —*PTI*

'SURGE IN MONSOON RAIN ACROSS AMID CLIMATE CRISIS'

PHOTO: PIXABAY

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Over 55 per cent of tehsils or sub-districts across the country saw a 10 per cent increase in the southwest monsoon rainfall in the last decade due to climate change, according to a new study released on Wednesday.

Independent think-tank 'The Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)'which analysed 40-year rainfall data for more than 4,500 tehsils across India, also found that 11 per cent of the sub-districts saw a reduction in the southwest monsoon rainfall in the last decade.

The tehsils that recorded deficient rain are located in the rain-fed Indo-Gangetic plains, northeast India and the upper Himalayan region. These areas are crucial for India's agricultural output and contain fragile ecosystems particularly vulnerable to extreme climate events.

Nearly a quarter of the tehsils studied in traditionally drier regions such as Rajasthan, Gujarat, central Maharashtra, and parts of Tamil Nadu saw a pronounced rainfall increase of over 30 per cent during the June to September period. —*PTI*

14-18 age group sees 86.8% enrolment in schools, colleges

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

The report said 25 per cent of those struggle to fluently read a Class-2 level text in their regional languages **PHOTO: PTI**

More than 86.8 per cent youngsters aged 14- 18 years in the country are currently enrolled in educational institutions with over half of them choosing the humanities stream, according to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) released on Wednesday.

However, the report highlighted that 25 per cent of those struggle to fluently read a Class-2 level text in their regional languages.

While the report noted small gender gaps in enrolment, it flagged notable differences between age groups. "Older youth are more likely to be not enrolled. The percentage of youth not enrolled is 3.9 per cent for 14-year-old youth and 32.6 per cent for 18-year-olds," it said.

Last year's report showed that the enrolment levels of children in the age bracket of six to 14 years had gone up from 96.6 per cent in 2010 to 96.7 per cent in 2014 and from 97.2 per cent in 2018 to 98.4 per cent in 2022.

The report said more than 55 per cent students of Classes 11-12 opt for humanities, followed by science and commerce. It also pointed out that females are less likely to be enrolled in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) streams than males.

The report asserted that the fear of several older students quitting school during the Covid-19 pandemic due to a loss of livelihood was unfounded.

- Only 5.6 per cent youngsters in the country are currently undergoing vocational training.

Only 5.6 per cent youngsters in the country are currently undergoing vocational training or have been enrolled in other related courses, the report said. —*PTI*

GURU GOBIND SINGH JAYANTI

A devotee takes a holy dip in Sarovar of Golden Temple in Amritsar on Guru Gobind Singh Jayanti on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Nihang sent to 7-day remand over murder

PHAGWARA, 17 JAN

PHOTO:

A man belonging to the Sikh Nihang sect who allegedly killed a youth on the premises of a gurdwara here was sent to police remand for a week by a court here on Wednesday.

Nihang Ramandeep Singh had claimed after the incident that the unidentified victim had come to the historic Gurdwara Chhevin Patshahi Chaura Khooh to commit an act of desecration.

Nobody has so far come forward to claim the body of the youth.

- The Nihang had posted a video on social media in which he took responsibility for the killing

Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) Gurinder Singh Dhillon had said a preliminary investigation revealed that no incident of desecration had taken place in the gurdwara.

Nihangs belong to a warrior Sikh sect whose members are usually seen in blue robes, carrying traditional weapons.

While Ramandeep Singh was arrested and booked under section 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) of the Indian Penal Code, police also invoked section 295A (outraging religious feelings) against the man who was killed.

Superintendent of Police Gurpreet Singh said Ramandeep Singh was sent to a seven-day police remand by the court.

The Nihang had posted a video on social media in which he took responsibility for the killing and claimed that he acted in self-defence. In another video uploaded by Singh, the victim is heard saying that he was sent by someone to engage in wrongdoing.

Dhillon had earlier said that IPC section 304 slapped against the Nihang could be converted into section 302 (murder) following further investigation. —*PTI*

On R-Day, Navy to show 'Atmanirbharta'

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

The Indian Navy will project its military might and firm resolve to safeguard the nation's strategic interests in the maritime domain at the Republic Day parade, amid growing global concerns over the escalating tensions in the Red Sea.

The naval tableau at the parade at Kartavya Path on 26 January will also showcase the Navy's "unwavering" commitment to 'Nari Shakti' with an overarching focus on women in all roles and across all ranks, officials said on Wednesday.

The contingent of the Indian Navy will have three women platoon commanders -- Lt Mudita Goyal, Lt Sharvani Supreiya and Lt Devika H.

For the first time, the Navy will have a mixed composition with 144 young men and women marching down the historic Kartavya path, the officials said. —*PTI*

FLYER LOCKED IN AIRPLANE WASHROOM

In the clouds but stranded in the loo

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

A SpiceJet passenger was stuck inside an aircraft lavatory for around an hour due to malfunctioning of the door lock while the aircraft was airborne, due to a malfunction in the door lock

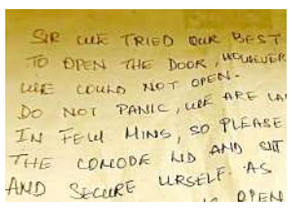
The incident occurred onboard the flight from Mumbai to Bengaluru on Tuesday, and the airline is providing a full refund to the passenger, according to a SpiceJet spokesperson.

An official said the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is looking into the incident.

The airline has apologised for the inconvenience caused to the passenger.

Soon after landing at the Bengaluru airport, an engineer opened the lavatory door and the passenger came out.

Details about the passenger could not be immediately ascertained. The spokesperson also said the passenger is being provided a full refund.


SIR WE TRIED OUR BEST
TO OPEN THE DOOR, HOWEVER
WE COULD NOT OPEN.
DO NOT PANIC, WE ARE
IN FEW MINS, SO PLEASE
THE CONDOR ND AND SIT
AND SECURE URSELF. AS

A crew member slid a note under the loo door to comfort the flyer **PHOTO: X**

Meanwhile, there have been complaints from passengers about not getting ticket refunds for flights that were cancelled in December.

When asked about the complaints, a SpiceJet spokesperson said all refunds against flights cancelled in December 2023 or before that have been processed by the airline.

Some passengers have taken to social media flagging about the delay in getting the refunds from SpiceJet. In a recent post on X, designer Shivi Pal said she was yet to get the refund for the ticket booked on SpiceJet flight from Varanasi that was cancelled on 27 December, 2023. "Wishing you all an Unhappy New Year with #spicejet. It has been almost 14 days since 27 December when my Spicejet flight from Varanasi airport was cancelled at night & till now no refund has been received in spite of ground staff taking passenger details," she said in the post on 11 January. —*PTI*

MEN AT WORK

Emergency workers work in an apartment house damaged in Russian rocket attack is seen in Kharkiv, Ukraine, in the early hours of of Wednesday
PHOTO: PTI

China: Population drops for 2nd straight year

According to data released by China's National Bureau of Statistics, in 2023 9.02 million babies were born in China, down by 5.6 per cent from 9.56 million in 2022 amid the plummeting interest in couples having children ***PHOTO: PTI***

China's population dipped for a second consecutive year as the overall numbers fell by 2.08 million last year to 1.4097 billion as India overtook China to become the most populous country in the world in 2023, according to the annual official data released on Wednesday.

China's population reported its first decline in six decades in 2022 after the birth rate hit a new low resulting in decades of the one-child policy pursued vigorously by the ruling Communist Party of China to control the population growth with experts predicting a steeper decline in the coming years in the world's second-largest economy.

According to the United Nations Population Fund data, India surpassed China to become the world's most populous nation with 142.86 crore people last year.

Last year 9.02 million babies were born in China, down by 5.6 per cent from 9.56 million in 2022 amid the plummeting interest in couples having children, according to data released by China's National Bureau of Statistics.

The falling number of new babies resulted in the lowest birth rate since records began in 1949, with 6.39 births for every 1,000 people, compared with 6.77 in 2022.

China implemented a third-child policy in May of 2021 and rolled out a series of stimulus measures to boost population growth. Several cities, provinces and regions across the country have rolled out incentive policies such as issuing subsidies to families with a second or third child.

China's population growth has been slowing since 2016 as the high cost of raising children, a greater pursuit of individualism and a diversified lifestyle dampen enthusiasm to start a family.

The country's zero-Covid policies, implemented between 2020 and late 2022, are also perceived to have contributed to the slide.

Last year, 11.1 million people also died, pushing the national death rate to 7.87 per 1,000 people pushing the national death rate to 7.87 per 1,000 people, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

Researchers warned that the Chinese economy which in the past significantly benefited from a demographic dividend, will have to tackle challenges including fewer working-age people, weaker spending power and a strained social security system as its population ages further.China's overall population is set to see a steeper decline in the coming years, said Professor Peng Xizhe from the Centre for Population and Development Policy Studies at Fudan University.

It's almost certain that the population will go on with negative growth, Peng told the Post.

As the cloud of the coronavirus pandemic wanes, and pronatalist policies "more or less make some difference", the number of newborns per year might rebound a little but is unlikely to exceed 10 million, he said."A rise in deaths related to COVID-19 may have occurred in early 2023 ... Looking ahead, as the population ages, annual deaths will continue growing in the future, surpassing 10 million people each year," Peng said.

"Therefore, with deaths outnumbering births, it's almost certain that the population will go on with negative growth," according to Peng.He Dan, the director of China Population and Development Research Centre said most factors that result in the decline in women choosing to have children or get married can be adjusted through the implementation of supportive policies.

"Though cities have released a slew of supportive policies to support childbearing women to give birth, the public's expectation is still not being met," He Dan told state-run Global Times tabloid.

He proposed a birth guarantee system to provide subsidies to individuals who care for newborns, aiming to encourage intergenerational support and help between family members and strengthen training and guidance on scientific parenting.

He also said the establishment of an "entire lifecycle of family services support zsystem" will be able to alleviate anxiety and stress related to childbirth and provide comprehensive support for reproductive health services, marriage and relationship services, and childcare services, among others. *—PTI*

SALAR ساڈا

Video gamers at higher risk of irreversible hearing loss

Researchers said that little attention has been paid to the effects of video games, including e-sports, on hearing loss ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Video gamers worldwide might be at a higher risk of irreversible hearing loss or developing a persistent ringing, or tinnitus, in their ears, new research published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) Public Health has found.

Such gamers are known to often expose themselves to high-intensity sound levels and for several hours at a stretch, and researchers have found that the sound levels often near, or exceed, permissible safe limits, which for children is 75 decibels for 40 hours a week.

The international research team, including researchers from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Medical University of South Carolina, US, reviewed 14 studies from 9 countries in North America, Europe, South East Asia, Asia and Australasia, that included more than 50,000 people in all.

The researchers said that "relatively little" attention has been paid to the effects of video games, including e-sports, on hearing loss, even as headphones, earbuds, and music venues have been acknowledged as sources of potentially unsafe sound levels.

"The findings suggest that there may be a need to prioritise interventions, such as initiatives focused on education and awareness of the potential risks of gaming, that can help promote safe listening among gamers," they wrote.

One of the research papers the team analysed estimated that there were more than 3 billion gamers worldwide in 2022, and six papers reported that video gaming prevalence among young people ranged from 20 to 68 per cent, they said.

In their analysis, the researchers found that of the five studies that evaluated associations between gaming and self-reported hearing loss or tinnitus, two linked the use of school students' gaming centre to more chances of severe tinnitus and high-frequency sound hearing loss in both ears.

> One of the research papers the team analysed estimated that there were more than 3 billion gamers worldwide in 2022, and six papers reported that video gaming prevalence among young people ranged from 20 to 68 per cent, they said

Other studies in the overall analysis associated video gaming with higher odds of self-reported hearing loss severity and measured sound levels of five video games through headphones attached to the gaming console - these averaged at 88.5, 87.6, 85.6 and 91.2 decibels (dB) for 4 separate shooter games, and 85.6 dB for a racing game.

The authors concluded that the daily level of sound exposure from these video games is close to maximum permissible levels of sound exposure, according to the standards of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) which, in collaboration with the WHO, has described a time-intensity trade-off, known as an exchange rate, for permissible levels and duration of exposure.

For children, the ITU has defined the permissible noise exposure level as 75 decibels for 40 hours a week with a 3-dB exchange rate, which meant that the permissible exposure time halves with every 3 dB increase in noise level.The children can therefore safely listen to an 83-decibel sound for around 6.5 hours, 86 dB for around 3.25 hours, 92 dB for 45 minutes, and 98 dB for only 12 minutes a week, the researchers explained.

Researchers said that "some gamers, particularly those who play frequently, and at or above the average sound levels described by papers included in this review, probably exceed permissible sound exposure limits, and are thus engaging in unsafe listening practices, which could put them at risk for developing permanent hearing loss and/or tinnitus." *—PTI*

Gamers often expose themselves to high-intensity sound levels for several hours at a stretch, and researchers have found that the sound levels often near, or exceed, permissible safe limit***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Israel's new $15 B war budget: What's it for and what gets cut?

The Bank of Israel estimated that war-related costs for 2023 to 2025 could amount to $55.6 billion
PHOTO: PTI

Waging war is a costly business for any state – and raising the funds required to fight one can be laden with political controversy.

But when that state's cabinet is volatile, mistrustful and deeply divided, then the stakes can be higher still.

Indeed, the 37th government of Israel has rarely enjoyed much harmony since it took office about a year ago. Three months into its war on Gaza, it was clear the funds assigned to the war efforts were not enough despite an emergency injection in December of nearly 30 billion shekels ($7.85 billion), mostly funded through increased borrowing.

On Monday, Netanyahu's cabinet approved an increased budget for 2024, which allocates an additional 55 billion shekels ($15 billion) for the war as well as increased funding for other departments despite fraught deliberations that caused the education minister, Yoav Kisch, to storm out in a rage when proposals to cut funding to his department were put forward.

In the end, after an all-night meeting, Kisch's concern was allayed when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced an increase in the education budget as well as the health budget.

Why did Israel's budget need to be amended?

The Israeli cabinet first met on Sunday to augment the two-year budget for 2023 and 2024, originally amounting to $270 billion, which it had approved in May.

Netanyahu, who has become a deeply unpopular figure in Israeli society, began by stating the government's budget aims.

"What is required now is, first of all, to cover the expenses of the war and to allow us to conduct the war in the coming year and complete it, including eliminating Hamas, returning our hostages and restoring security and the sense of security in both the north and the south so that the residents can return there," he told his cabinet.

It's one thing to make bold wartime declarations but quite another to pay for them, not least in the face of shocking statistics.

Israel's war on Gaza – which has killed more than 24,000 Palestinians, with thousands more lost under the rubble and presumed dead, and has injured tens of thousands more – has cost the country about $269m each day since it began on 7 October.

The Bank of Israel estimated that war-related costs for 2023 to 2025 could amount to $55.6bn.

This makes troubling reading for a country that, feeling the financial pinch that often comes with waging a war, posted a budget deficit of 4.2 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023, compared with a 0.6 percent surplus the year before. As a result of this new budget, the deficit for 2024 has widened to 6.6 percent of Israel's GDP.

What is in the amended budget?

The new, 582-billion-shekel ($155bn) budget for 2024 has been reached by cutting funding for government departments by an average of 3 percent and increasing spending by $18.6bn.

After the cabinet agreed on the budget, Netanyahu hailed the "increases to ... the internal security budget, but most importantly, the defence budget, which is simply essential for victory and for our future".

The fractious Israeli coalition government – which includes the political parties Likud, United Torah Judaism, Shas, Religious Zionism Party, Otzma Yehudit, Noam and National Unity – is the most right-wing in the country's history.

However, National Unity, led by Netanyahu rival Benny Gantz, voted against Monday's financial plan after its bid to push for more cuts, including from the $2.15bn pot given over to so-called coalition funding in 2022, was rejected.

These funds include money to fund the ongoing construction of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories, which, despite being illegal under international law, continue to expand.Yossi Mekelberg, an associate fellow with the Middle East and North Africa Programme at London's Chatham House, told Al Jazeera that the coalition funding deal struck between Netanyahu and the ultra-Orthodox members of his government is still much-wanted by ministers.

"They still want the coalition agreement that allocates money to their causes," Mekelberg said.

In the end, this fund saw only a small cut of $663.5m.

What will the extra $15 billion pay for?

The additional money will buy military hardware for starters as well as pay Israel's 360,000 army reservists . Also included are funds to support the more than 100,000 Israelis evacuated from communities bordering Gaza and neighbouring Lebanon, where Israeli forces are clashing with Hezbollah, the Lebanese resistance group.

"We changed the priorities so that every reservist and every fighter and his family knows that there is a government that stands behind him and fully takes care of him," Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said after the budget was approved.

As a country at war, safeguarding Israel's internal security was a crucial consideration too.

The far-right national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, who himself lives in an illegal settlement in Hebron in the occupied West Bank, had previously threatened to withdraw his support from any budget that stripped money away from his ministry.His department duly received an extra $534million in the new budget.

Could Israel run out of money for its war?

Funds probably will not dry up in the short term. Whatever the pressures on Israel's finances as a result of its war on Gaza and raids on the West Bank, the Israeli state can likely rely on unwavering United States military and financial support.

In November, the US House of Representatives greenlit legislation to provide $14.5 billion of military aid to Israel in addition to the $3.8 billion given to the country each year. It has yet to pass the Senate. Israel's new budget also faces legislative scrutiny. It will now be referred to the Knesset, where three votes are required for it to become law.In the longer term, and despite current strains on the country's finances, Mekelberg said the "Israeli economy can recover – and recover relatively quickly" but only if Israel finds a way to end the war.This will require real leadership, he added. With the war on Gaza now more than three months old, "people forget that the 10 months before the war was [already] a time of political instability and protest [in Israel]," Mekelberg said.

Courtesy, Al Jazeera

Pak's EC warns of election delay due to 'symbol dispute'

ISLAMABAD, 17 JAN

Pakistan's election commission has warned that the general elections may have to be delayed if the process of changing electoral symbols does not stop, asserting that it could not keep making alterations with the February 8 polls just around the corner. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said in a statement on Tuesday that after the allotment of the election symbols, political actors are "having them changed through various forums", the Dawn newspaper reported. Asserting that despite having issued repeated instructions to relevant authorities that election symbols should remain unchanged once the printing starts, the ECP said that if the trend of changing the election symbols did not stop, there would be no other option but to postpone the polls in such constituencies. "If the process of changing the election symbols continues in the same way, there is a fear of election delay because the ballot papers will have to be reprinted, for which time is already limited, and on the other hand, the special paper available for the ballot papers will also be lost," the ECP statement said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

US will continue to support Ukraine, says NSA Sullivan

DAVOS, 17 JAN

The US will continue to support Ukraine, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan has assured. The assurance came soon after Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that the assistance from the US and Europe was necessary to win the war against Russia. He said Ukraine will continue to stand against Russia even if there was no support, but it would be a bad experiment and it would not be only Ukrainian people who would suffer as those thinking that it was only Ukraine's war were fundamentally wrong. In a special address at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting here on Tuesday, Sullivan also offered a message of hope for peace. *—PTI*

2 killed and 77 injured in Nigeria blast

ABUJA, 17 JAN

Two people died and 77 others were injured after a massive blast rocked more than a dozen buildings in one of Nigeria's largest cities on Tuesday night, the governor said Wednesday, as rescue workers dug through the rubble in search of those feared trapped. Residents in the southwestern state of Oyo's densely populated Ibadan city heard a loud blast at about 7:45 pm, causing panic as many fled their homes. By Wednesday morning, security forces cordoned off the area while medical personnel and ambulances were on standby as rescue efforts intensified. *—AP*

'Cocaine residue found on Hunter Biden's gun pouch'

WASHINGTON, 17 JAN

Federal prosecutors urged a judge on Tuesday to reject Hunter Biden's efforts to dismiss the gun charges against him, revealing that investigators last year found cocaine residue on the pouch the president's son used to hold his gun. In pressing for the case against President Joe Biden's son to proceed, prosecutors said "the strength of the evidence against him is overwhelming" and pushed back against Hunter Biden's claims that he is being singled out for political purposes. "Incriminating statements" Hunter Biden made about his drug use in his 2021 memoir, investigators found a white powdery substance on the brown leather pouch he used to store the gun after pulling it from the state police vault last year, prosecutors wrote. An FBI chemist determined it was cocaine, they said. *—AP*

Pak warns Iran of serious 'consequences' after attack

Iran's attack could potentially raise tensions in the Middle East

ISLAMABAD, 17 JAN

Two bases of Balochi militant group Jaish al Adl in Pakistan were targeted by missiles on Tuesday
PHOTO: IANS

Pakistan on Wednesday warned Iran of "serious consequences" after Tehran launched an unprecedented missile and drone strikes on terrorist bases of a Sunni militant group in the restive Balochistan province, which killed two children and injured three others.

Two bases of Balochi militant group Jaish al Adl in Pakistan were targeted by missiles on Tuesday, Iranian state media reported, a day after Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards attacked targets in Iraq and Syria with missiles.

Islamabad also summoned the Iranian charge d'affaires here to the foreign ministry and issued a strongly-worded condemnation of Iran's "violation of its airspace", the Foreign Office said.

Iran's attack could potentially raise tensions in the Middle East, already roiled by Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

"Two key strongholds of the Jaysh al-Dhulm (Jaish al-Adl) terrorist group in Pakistan" were "specifically targeted and successfully demolished," Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency said.

Claiming that the area targeted is called "Green Mountain", the agency said that the bases were targeted by a combination of missile and drone attacks.

Tehran has repeatedly warned that the Jaish al-Adl militant group is using Pakistani soil in the border town of Panjgur in Balochistan to launch terror attacks on Iranian security forces.

The Foreign Office of Pakistan described the incident as an "unprovoked violation of its airspace" by Iran. It said the attack killed two children and injured three others.

"Pakistan vehemently protests the violation of its sovereignty," the Foreign Office said, adding that it was "completely unacceptable" and may have "serious consequences". "A strong protest has already been lodged with the senior official concerned in the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran.

Additionally, the Iranian charge d'affaires has been called to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to convey our strongest condemnation of this blatant violation of Pakistan's sovereignty and that the responsibility for the consequences will lie squarely with Iran," the statement said.

It also expressed concern that the "illegal act took place despite the existence of several established channels of communication between Pakistan and Iran".

Pakistan's former prime minister, Shehbaz Sharif, reacting to the attack, said that the Iranian breach of Pakistani sovereignty was against the spirit of friendship between the two countries and would undermine their historic relationship. *—PTI*

2.3 MILLION FLEE

The medicines will be shipped through Egypt and delivered to the International Committee of the Red Cross
PHOTO: AP

Qatar, France send med for hostages in Gaza

RAFAH, 17 JAN

A shipment of medicine for dozens of hostages held by Hamas was en route to Gaza on Wednesday after France and Qatar mediated the first agreement between Israel and the militant group since a week-long cease-fire broke down in November.

The medicines will be shipped through Egypt and delivered to the International Committee of the Red Cross, which will then hand them over to Hamas. Qatar said the deal also includes the delivery of additional medicine and humanitarian aid to Palestinians in the besieged coastal enclave.

The deal came more than 100 days into a conflict that shows no sign of ending and which has sparked tensions across the Middle East, with a dizzying array of strikes and counter-strikes in recent days from northern Iraq to the Red Sea and from southern Lebanon to Pakistan.

In Gaza, Palestinian militants are still putting up resistance across the narrow coastal strip in the face of one of the deadliest military campaigns in recent history. Some 85 per cent of the territory's population of 2.3 million people have fled their homes and the UN says a quarter of the population is starving.

Israel has vowed to dismantle Hamas' military and governing abilities to ensure that it can never repeat the 7 October attack that triggered the war. Militants burst through Israel's border defences and stormed through several communities, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and capturing around 250.

A welter of strikes across the Middle East

In just the last few days, a US-led coalition has carried out strikes against Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, Iran has struck what it described as an Israeli spy headquarters in northern Iraq and militant bases in Pakistan and Syria, and Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah have escalated the intensity of their fighting across the border.

Iran-backed militant groups across the region say they are striking US and Israeli targets to pressure them to halt the Gaza offensive. Iran itself has encouraged the attacks while avoiding direct involvement, but appeared to be flexing its muscles with the strikes in Syria and Pakistan.

The Houthis have vowed to continue attacking international shipping in the Red Sea in what they say is a blockade of Israel, with repercussions for global trade. *—AP*

SL overturns ex-prez granting pardon to a murder convict

COLOMBO, 17 JAN

Rajapaksa
PHOTO: PTI

In a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka on Wednesday overturned a presidential pardon granted by former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to a close aide who was convicted of murder.

The ruling by the apex court was the first such case since the presidential form of governance introduced in 1978. Rajapaksa, in mid-2021, had pardoned a close political aide Duminda Silva who had been subjected to the death penalty for murdering a local political rival from the same party in 2011. This pardoning was later challenged by the relatives of Silva's victim Bharata Lakshman Premachandra.

Silva and Premachandra were vying for political supremacy in the Colombo suburb of Kolonnawa during the presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa. Silva was convicted of gunning down Premachandra. Gotabaya, who succeeded Mahinda in 2019 as the president, had pardoned Silva.

However, on Wednesday, a three-member bench of the Supreme Court said Rajapaksa had not given any reasons why he was pardoning Silva while also having failed to follow due process. Under Article 34 of the Constitution, Sri Lanka's presidents are empowered to grant pardons subject to a stipulated process. *—PTI*

US, S Korea, Japan conduct drills as tensions deepen with N Korea

SEOUL, 17 JAN

The United States, South Korea and Japan conducted combined naval exercises involving an American aircraft carrier in their latest show of strength against nuclear-armed North Korea, South Korea's military said on Wednesday, as the three countries' senior diplomats were to meet in Seoul to discuss the deepening standoff with Pyongyang. The training in waters off South Korea's Jeju Island came as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un continues a provocative run in weapons testing and threats that has raised regional tensions to their highest point in years. At Pyongyang's rubber-stamp parliament this week, Kim declared that North Korea would abandon its long-standing commitment to a peaceful unification with South Korea and ordered a rewriting of North's constitution to eliminate the idea of a shared statehood between the war-divided countries. His speech on Monday came a day after the North conducted its first ballistic test of 2024, which state-media described as a new solid-fuel intermediate range missile tipped with a hypersonic warhead, reflecting its push to advance its lineup of weapons targeting US military bases in Guam and Japan. *—AP*

FROSTY MORNINGS, TOASTY MUGS

Pedestrians walk in Central Park as snow falls accompanied by cold temperatures in New York City on Wednesday
PHOTO: JOHN ANGELILLO/UPI

UK PM faces key Rwanda vote after resignations

LONDON, 17 JAN

Rishi Sunak
PHOTO: PTI

Rishi Sunak is facing a crucial vote on his Rwanda bill, after two Conservative deputy chairmen and a ministerial aide resigned to rebel over the issue.

On Tuesday Lee Anderson, Brendan Clarke-Smith and Jane Stevenson stepped down to vote for changes they said would toughen up the legislation. In a blow to the PM's authority, 60 Tory MPs backed rebel amendments.

No 10 is confident the bill as a whole will still pass later, but is thought to be preparing to offer concessions. MPs are set to continue debating proposed changes to the legislation - which seeks to deter Channel crossings by reviving the government's plan to send some asylum seekers to Rwanda - in the Commons on Wednesday, with the bill put to a vote afterwards if it remains unamended.

If around 30 Tory MPs join opposition parties in voting against the bill at its final Commons hurdle, it could be defeated. So far very few Conservative MPs have explicitly committed to voting against the bill. At least four Conservative MPs - including former ministers Robert Jenrick and Suella Braverman - have publicly said they are prepared to vote against the bill if it is not improved.

But it is unclear how many more could join them. Illegal Migration Minister Michael Tomlinson told BBC Breakfast the Tory rebellion against the policy was a sign of "constructive and robust debate". Playing down the scale of Conservative divisions, he said: "Almost every single person, in fact every single person, who stood up on our side on the Conservative side said they want this scheme to work".

Tomlinson said he was "very sorry" that two party deputy chairmen and a parliamentary private secretary resigned, but that "each and every one of them want this policy to work". *—BBC News*

Imran Khan's lawyer invokes Indian court

LAHORE, 17 JAN

Imran Khan
PHOTO: PTI

Beleaguered Imran Khan's lawyer invoked what and how an Indian court enlists the offence of moral turpitude compared with financial corruption when fighting the rejection of the jailed former prime minister's nomination papers from two constituencies ahead of the 8 February general elections.

Advocate Uzair Bhandari, representing Khan, the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) party, made the comparison when the full bench of the Lahore High Court heard two petitions in connection with the rejection of Khan's nomination papers on Tuesday, the Dawn newspaper reported on Wednesday.

The High Court reserved its verdict in the case, the report said. The 71-year-old founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) party has been incarcerated at a high-security jail facing multiple cases. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had rejected the nomination papers of Khan from the Lahore (NA-122) and Mianwali (NA-89) constituencies, both in Punjab province.

The ECP had rejected Khan's nomination papers primarily on the grounds of being convicted in the Toshakhana corruption case. Also, his nomination papers from NA-122 were dismissed on the grounds that the proposer was not a voter from the constituency.

In the Toshakhana case, Khan is accused of taking luxurious vehicles from the national treasury in violation of the Toshakhana or state repository rules. *—PTI*

Sexual abuse: Trump accuser set to testify

NEW YORK, 17 JAN

Less than a year after convincing a jury that former President Donald Trump sexually abused her decades ago, writer E Jean Carroll is set to take the stand again to describe how his verbal attacks affected her after she came forward.

Carroll is due to testify Wednesday in the second federal civil trial over her claims against Trump, who denies them all. Because the first jury found that Trump sexually abused Carroll in the 1990s and then defamed her in 2022, the new trial concerns only how much more — if anything — he'll be ordered to pay her for some other remarks. He made them while he was president.

Trump, who is juggling court appearances with campaign stops as he leads the Republican field in this year's presidential race, sat in on jury selection Tuesday. Before opening statements began, he left for a New Hampshire rally.

He declared on social media Tuesday that the case was nothing but "fabricated lies and political shenanigans" that had garnered his accuser money and fame. "I am the only one injured by this attempted EXTORTION," read a post on his Truth Social platform.

But Carroll, an advice columnist and magazine writer, has said that Trump harmed her deeply. *—AP*

REPUBLICAN DEBATE

'Won't participate unless Trump takes part in it'

IOWA, 17 JAN

ABC News on Tuesday cancelled the next Republican presidential debate after Nikki Haley said she wouldn't participate unless former President Donald Trump takes part in it, leaving Governor Ron DeSantis as the only candidate committed to Thursday's event in New Hampshire.

"We've had five great debates in this campaign," Haley said in a statement, released as she campaigned in New Hampshire. "Unfortunately, Donald Trump has ducked all of them. He has nowhere left to hide. The next debate I do will either be with Donald Trump or with Joe Biden. I look forward to it."

Her statement was released a day after the all-important Iowa caucuses, in which Trump marked a wide margin of victory over both Haley and DeSantis. With the two locked in a heated competition for second place in Iowa, Haley tried to make her electoral argument more about Trump than DeSantis, repeatedly echoing her refrain that her candidacy marks a turnabout from the "chaos" that follows the GOP frontrunner.

The move also could be a result of the last debate which featured only Haley and DeSantis, in which Haley didn't perform as well as expected, and DeSantis ultimately ended up beating her for second place in Iowa. Haley had argued to caucusgoers that picking her gives Republicans a better chance to defeat Biden in November, pointing to survey data showing her with the largest lead among the GOP field in a theoretical general election matchup.

Haley tried to make her electoral argument more about Donald Trump than DeSantis
PHOTO: AP

"Our intent was to host a debate coming out of the Iowa caucuses, but we always knew that would be contingent on the candidates and the outcome of the race," ABC News spokesperson Van Scott said in a statement.

Haley's decision also casts doubt on another New Hampshire debate scheduled for Sunday on CNN.

On X, DeSantis said Haley "is afraid to debate because she doesn't want to answer the tough questions." He accused her of "running to be Trump's VP" and said that he looked "forward to debating two empty podiums in the Granite State this week." *—AP*

- The move also could be a result of the last debate which featured only Haley and DeSantis, in which Haley didn't perform as well as expected, and DeSantis ultimately ended up beating her for second place in Iowa

Rupee settles 1 paisa lower at 83.13 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 17 JAN

The rupee slipped 1 paisa to settle at 83.13 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday amid massive selling in domestic equity markets and a strong greenback overseas. However, renewed foreign capital inflows and a sharp fall in crude oil prices in the international markets supported the local currency and capped the losses, forex dealers said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic currency opened at 83.13 and traded in the range of 83.07 to 83.17 against the dollar.The unit finally settled at 83.13 (provisional) against the greenback, down 1 paisa from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee declined 26 paise to settle at 83.12 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.06 per cent higher at 103.05 on Wednesday. Analysts attributed gains in the US dollar to safe-haven demands amid concern over disruption in global trade through the Red Sea route.—*PTI*

Gold plunges ₹400; silver tumbles ₹600

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Gold prices plunged Rs 400 to Rs 63,050 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid weak cues in the overseas market, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 63,450 per 10 grams. Silver also tumbled Rs 600 to Rs 75,800 per kilogram.
In the global markets, gold and silver were quoting lower at USD 2,024 per ounce and USD 22.70 per ounce, respectively. Gold witnessed significant downward pressure due to the strengthening dollar index and higher US Treasury yields, Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.
—*PTI*

Greater Noida to soon ink 'Sister City' pact with US'

NOIDA, 17 JAN

Greater Noida may soon enter into a 'Sister City' agreement with the US' Loudoun County, in a move that can open the way for large-scale investment, academic and cultural exchanges between them, officials said. A team of representatives from Loudoun County, in Virginia State of the US and some 70 km off Washington DC, was in Greater Noida on Tuesday. According to officials, the Greater Noida Authority has been trying for a long time to enter into an agreement with Loudon County as a 'sister city', or 'twin city'.A Sister City Agreement (Twinning of Cities), facilitates direct exchange of education, business, culture, biotech, agriculture, pharmaceutical, information and technology, etc. between two cities.
On Tuesday, during its Greater Noida visit, the Loudoun County delegation was apprised about the Noida International Airport, road infrastructure, metro connectivity, expressways, greenery, big companies, educational institutions, data centre hub, etc, in the region, according to the statement.—*PTI*

Lufthansa Airlines launches Hyd-Frankfurt flights

HYDERABAD, 17 JAN

GMR Hyderabad International Airport Ltd (GHIAL) on Wednesday announced the launch of direct flights to Frankfurt, Germany in partnership with Lufthansa Airlines.With five weekly departures (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday), the flight LH753 will depart from Hyderabad at 1.55am and arrive in Frankfurt at 7.05am. Lufthansa Group Senior said, "As we launch Hyderabad-Frankfurt service, our capacity to India has increased by 14per cent ,making this country the fastest growing major market for Lufthansa." —*PTI*

Market sees biggest crash since 2022, investors lose Rs 5L cr

The 30-share BSE Sensex plunged 1,628.01 points or 2.23 % to settle at 71,500.76

MUMBAI, 17 JAN

The Nifty tanked 460.35 points or 2.09 per cent to settle at 21,571.95 *PHOTO: PTI*

- Benchmark Sensex nosedived 1,628 points or 2.23 per cent on Wednesday. This marks its biggest single-day slide in more than one-and-a-half years following an intense sell-off in banking, metal and oil shares triggered by weak global trends

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The 30-share BSE Sensex plunged 1,628.01 points or 2.23 per cent to settle at 71,500.76 with 24 of its constituents ending in the red. During the day, it plummeted 1,699.47 points or 2.32 per cent to a low of 71,429.30.

The Nifty tanked 460.35 points or 2.09 per cent to settle at 21,571.95, falling for the second day in a row.

Key stock indices suffered their worst single-day losses in percentage terms since June 13, 2022.

The heavy fall in the markets comes on the back of a recent record-breaking rally. The BSE benchmark hit its all-time high of 73,427.59 on Tuesday, and the Nifty also reached its lifetime peak of 22,124.15 on the previous day.

Among the Sensex firms, HDFC Bank fell over 8 per cent after its December quarter earnings failed to cheer investors.

HDFC Bank on Tuesday reported a 2.65 per cent rise in consolidated net profit of Rs 17,258 crore for the October-December period against Rs 16,811 crore in the preceding September quarter.

Tata Steel, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, JSW Steel, Bajaj Finserv, Maruti, IndusInd Bank and State Bank of India were among the other major laggards.

HCL Technologies, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, Nestle and Larsen & Toubro were the gainers.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower.

European markets were also trading with sharp cuts. The US markets ended in negative territory on Tuesday.

"Today's market fall is led by banks on the back of HDFC Bank results, showing heightened levels of credit/deposit (CD) ratio beyond RBI's comfort levels.

This is the case with most other banks as well. Thus, the markets expect either margin pressure, in case banks go in for aggressive deposit mobilisation, a slowdown in lending growth, or both. This development can lead to some de-rating of the sector. After the significant up move we have witnessed recently, markets are taking a breather, especially since market valuations are higher than historical multiples," said Naveen Kulkarni, Chief Investment Officer, Axis Securities PMS.

Snapping its five-day winning run, the BSE benchmark declined 199.17 points, or 0.27 per cent, to settle at 73,128.77 on Tuesday. The Nifty ended lower by 65.15 points, or 0.29 per cent, at 22,032.30.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 1.84 per cent to USD 76.85 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 656.57 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

—*PTI*

WEF STUDY

Among the lower middle-income economies, India and Kenya scored high on sustainability *PHOTO: PTI*

'GDP growth in most countries not inclusive'

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Most economies are growing in ways that are neither sustainable nor inclusive and are limited in their ability to absorb or generate innovation and minimise their contribution and susceptibility to global shocks, a new report said on Wednesday.

The Future of Growth Report released here by the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2024 called for a new approach to economic growth that balances efficiency with long-term sustainability and equity, examining speed and quality together. High-income economies score high on innovation and inclusion, while lower-income economies on sustainability, said the report that took a holistic look at GDP alongside the quality of growth across 107 economies.

Among the lower middle-income economies, India and Kenya scored high on sustainability, Jordan on innovativeness; Vietnam on inclusiveness; and the Philippines on resilience. Common challenges preventing a stronger balanced growth performance of this group included technology absorption, lack of social safety nets, insufficient investment in renewable energy, and insufficient healthcare system capacity.

The report highlighted a significant economic slowdown, estimated to fall to the lowest rate in three decades by 2030, amid ongoing economic and geopolitical shocks. This downturn is exacerbating a range of interconnected global challenges, including the climate crisis and a weakening social contract, which are collectively reversing progress in global development, it said.

—*PTI*

Gautam Adani with Telangana CM Revanth Reddy *PHOTO: X*

Adani Group signs deals to invest ₹12.4K cr in T'gana

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Adani Group on Wednesday said it will invest over Rs 12,400 crore in an array of projects including a data centre, clean energy project, and a cement plant in Telangana. The group signed four memorandums of understanding (MoUs) for the investments at the World Economic Forum in Davos in presence of Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and Adani Group chairman GautamAdani.

The conglomerate's flagship firm Adani Enterprises will invest Rs 5,000 crore in setting up a 100 MW data centre that will use green energy while its renewable energy unit Adani Green Energy Ltd will spend an equivalent amount in setting up two pump storage projects. The conglomerate's Ambuja Cements will put in Rs 1,400 crore to build 6 million tonne a year (MTPA) cement plant and Adani Defence and Aerospace will invest another Rs 1,000 crore to set up counter drone and missile facilities.

Adani Enterprises Ltd (AEL) will set up a 100 MW data centre, which would be powered by renewable energy, over the coming 5-7 years. It will work closely with local MSMEs and startups to develop a globally competent supplier base for the project, which will provide employment, both direct and indirect, to 600 people. —*PTI*

HDFC posts worst earnings, shares fall 7%

MUMBAI, 17 JAN

PHOTO: X

Shares of HDFC Bank fell 7 per cent in morning trade on Wednesday after its December quarter earnings failed to impress investors.

The stock tanked 6.48 per cent to Rs 1,570 on the BSE.

It fell by 7 per cent to Rs 1,560 on the NSE.

The company's market capitalisation (mcap) also eroded by Rs 72,736 crore to Rs 12,02,004.22crore in early trade.

It was the biggest laggard among the Sensex and Nifty firms.

In the broader equity market, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex traded 891.66 points lower at 72,237.11, and the Nifty quoted 247.20 points down at 21,785.10.

HDFC Bank on Tuesday reported a 2.65 per cent rise in consolidated net profit of Rs 17,258 crore for the October-December period against Rs 16,811 crore in the preceding September quarter.

The largest private sector lender, which merged mortgage lender parent HDFC into itself in July, reported a net profit of Rs 16,372 crore against Rs 15,976 crore in the quarter-ago period on a standalone basis.

"HDFC Bank reported a mixed quarter," according to a report by MotilalOswal Research.

Its core net interest income grew to Rs 28,470 crore during the quarter, while the other income stood at Rs 11,140 crore, according to exchange filings.

On the asset quality front, it registered an improvement in the gross non-performing assets ratio at 1.26 per cent against 1.34 per cent in the quarter-ago period.

—*PTI*

HAL to showcase its new aircraft, chopper

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited will showcase its indigenously built Hindustan-228 aircraft and Advanced Light Helicopter Dhruv during Wings India 2024, a civil aviation conclave and exhibition, which will be held from 18-21 January at Begumpet Airport here.

A press release from the HAL said they will hold business meetings with OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) and customers besides signing agreements with its business partners for various projects. CB Ananthakrishnan, CMD (Additional Charge), HAL, said that they are propelling the initiative of 'Made in India' fixed wing civil aircraft to boost regional connectivity in India.

The HAL stall will display scale models of Light Utility Helicopter (civil variant), Hindustan-228, ALH (civil variant), Line Replaceable Units (LRUs) and accessories pertaining to civil aircraft.

An official press release said the upgraded civil Dhruv helicopter, a variant of Advanced Light Helicopter, is a 5.5 ton, twin engine helicopter, designed and developed by HAL. It can be used in disaster management, Search and Rescue (SAR), underslung roles, heli-tourism and VIP ferry. The helicopter has an advanced glass cockpit and avionics. It would meet the regional connectivity programme of the government, the release added. The Hindustan 228 aircraft is a multipurpose, lightweight twin turboprop aircraft indigenously developed by HAL to cater to the remote regional connectivity on short haul air routes.

—*PTI*

BHEL gets 2.4K MW project from NLC India in Odisha

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

State-owned BHEL on Wednesday said it has bagged an order to set up a 2,400 MW supercritical thermal power project (STPP) from coal PSU NLC India Ltd.

This is the largest power sector order won by the company through competitive bidding, BHEL said in a statement.

The scope of the contract includes engineering, manufacturing, supply, erection, and commissioning of crucial equipment, such as boilers, turbines, generators, and other auxiliary systems, for the 3x800 MW thermal power project.

The scope also includes boilers with biomass co-firing capability and highly efficient latest pollution control equipment. The project will be commissioned within 64 months. On commissioning, this plant will contribute to meeting the future base load requirement of electricity in the country.

The major equipment will be manufactured at BHEL's Trichy, Haridwar, Hyderabad, Jhansi, Bengaluru, Ranipet, Bhopal, Rudrapur, and Varanasi plants while the company's power sector southern region will be responsible for the civil works, and erection and commissioning of the equipment.

- BHEL has a long-standing partnership with NLCIL and installed a significant 77 per cent of the coal/lignite-based power stations of the utility, totalling 3,590 MW

BHEL has a long-standing partnership with NLCIL and installed a significant 77 per cent of the coal/lignite-based power stations of the utility, totalling 3,590 MW.

It is the largest manufacturer of power generation equipment in the country and has been a major partner in the country's vision to achieve self-reliance in energy.

—*PTI*

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik *PHOTO: PTI*

Naveen Patnaik launches ₹800cr corridor project

PURI, 17 JAN

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday inaugurated the Rs 800-crore heritage corridor project around the historic Sri Jagannath Temple in Puri.

The Srimandir Parikrama Prakalpa was officially unveiled by Patnaik in presence of Gajapati Maharaja of Puri Divyasingha Deb and representatives of around 90 temples and thousands of devotees.

It includes parking areas, a new bridge and a road to ease pilgrim movement, a pilgrimage centre, restroom facilities, cloakrooms, toilets and other amenities for devotees in and around the Jagannath temple, officials said.

The pilgrim town of Puri has been decked up with flowers, colourful lights and graffiti for the occasion.

—*PTI*

Deloitte India to cut emissions attributed to software

DAVOS, 17 JAN

Deloitte India on Wednesday unveiled an accessible software development that aims to cut up to 30 per cent of the emissions attributed to software alone.

Launching the Code here on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2024, it said this initiative marks a leap towards global efforts to reduce carbon footprint.

Currently, about 3 per cent of the world's carbon emissions are attributed to the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector, equivalent to roughly 1.58 billion tonne per year.

Within this 3 per cent, ECC has the potential to reduce up to 30 per cent of the emissions attributed solely to software, which is a significant reduction in power consumption and storage.Deloitte said emissions from core software often go unnoticed, quietly adding to greenhouse gases. There are over 1 billion active websites, with 200 million in India alone.

It said it analysed popular Indian websites, revealing that each website emits, on an average, CO_2 equivalent to a petrol car covering 10km per user, assuming all pages are viewed. This is also equivalent to CO_2 absorbed by nearly 20 trees per day. —*PTI*

LINKEDIN REPORT

88% of professionals consider job change in 2024

MUMBAI, 28 JAN

Nearly 88 per cent of professionals are considering a new job this year amid an increase in competition, a report said on Wednesday.

According to the report, the desire for better work-life balance (42 per cent) and need for higher wages (37 per cent) in a challenging economic environment are the biggest reasons for mulling changing jobs.

The LinkedIn report is based on a research by Censuswide on 1,097 professionals in full-time or part-time employment across India between 24 November and 12 December, 2023.

About 88 per cent of professionals in the country are considering a new job in 2024, up by 4 per cent compared to last year, a LinkedIn report revealed.

PHOTO: PTI

They are also willing to explore new career paths with almost 8 in 10 (79 per cent) Indian professionals interviewed saying they are looking for opportunities outside their industry or role.

Around 72 per cent of professionals interviewed said they have changed their job search approach, like experimenting with new formats such as video and digital resumes.

They are also keen on using AI with around 81 per cent of professionals saying it can help make their job hunt more efficient and productive, it noted.

Over 79 per cent of professionals are posting more content on LinkedIn and 83 per cent are becoming more active in growing their professional network, the report added.

To be successful in their job hunt, it's essential for professionals to stand out by dedicating time to spruce up their profiles, highlighting their skills, and staying informed about industry developments, LinkedIn India Career Expert and Senior Managing Editor Nirajita Banerjee said.

— *PTI*

Google Pay to expand UPI payments outside India

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Google India Digital Services and NPCI International Payments Ltd (NIPL) have signed an agreement that will help expand UPI payments to countries outside India.

The memorandum of understanding (MoU) will enable Indian travellers to make payments in other countries via Google Pay (also known as GPay), eliminating the need to carry cash or resort to international payment gateways.

"The MoU intends to assist in establishing UPI-like digital payment systems in other countries, providing a model for seamless financial transactions. Lastly, it focuses on easing the process of remittances between countries by utilizing the UPI infrastructure, thereby simplifying cross-border financial exchanges," Google Pay said.

— *PTI*

PHOTO: AP

We are looking for more attack-minded players: Stimac

DOHA, 17 JAN

India head coach Igor Stimac on Wednesday said his team has a "coupe of players" with few injury issues but that will not stop them from going all out in an attempt to secure full points against Uzbekistan in the AFC Asian Cup here on Thursday.India lost their opening game against tournament favorites Australia 0-2 after a spirited performance, while higher-ranked Uzbekistan is coming off a goal-less draw with Syria.Blue Tigers head coach Igor Stimac said, "It is a huge match for us. The first game was an experience for the boys, and now we face another difficult match. Uzbekistan is a very competitive side, and since they did not gain a victory in their last game, we expect them to put a lot of pressure on us."But our boys are ready for the challenge. We are happy for this opportunity that lies ahead of us.—*AP*

Axar, Jaiswal break into top 10 of ICC T20I rankings

DUBAI, 17 JAN

Riding on two excellent outings against Afghanistan in the ongoing series, India left-arm spinner Axar Patel on Wednesday leaped to his career-best fifth place while opening batter Yashasvi Jaiswal rose to the sixth spot in the latest ICC men's T20I player rankings.Patel's hauls of two for 23 and two for 16 in India's identical six-wicket wins over Afghanistan in the first two T20Is of their three-match series have also lifted him two places to 16th among all-rounders. Jaiswal's 34-ball 68 in the first T20I in Indore lifted him seven places to a career-best sixth position.—*AP*

PHOTO: AP

We might open with two spinners: James Anderson

ABU DHABI, 17 JAN

Veteran English seamer James Anderson says his team might be compelled to open with two spinners in the upcoming five-Test series against India as it looks for ways to counter the traditionally spin-friendly conditions in the host country.The Three Lions have moved in with four specialist spinners in their squad Jack Leach, Rehan Ahmed, Tom Hartley and Shoaib Bashir. Leach is the only one to have experienced playing the longest format in India. The series begins January 25 in Hyderabad and the English team is undergoing a training camp in Abu Dhabi.The spin department will receive guidance from Anderson, Ollie Robinson and Mark Wood.—*AP*

Rejuvenated India eye win against Germany

RANCHI, 17 JAN

Just one win away from securing a Paris Olympics berth, a resilient Indian women's hockey team will need to produce its 'A' game against higher-ranked Germany in the semifinals of the FIH Olympic Qualifiers here on Thursday. The Indians bounced back from a 0-1 loss to the USA in their tournament opener to outclass New Zealand and Italy to seal their semi-final spot as the second-placed team from Pool B.It was a near-perfect performance in the last two matches with all departments clicking in unison and the Savita Punia-led side would look to continue the same way in the business end of the tournament.—*PTI*

India beat Afghanistan in 2nd Super Over, sweep series 3-0

Rohit hundred, Rinku fifty power India to 212/4

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

A winner for the India vs Afghanistan third and final T20I was decided through not one but two Super Overs in Bengaluru. Both the teams had their scores tied at 212 after which the contest went into a Super Over.

The thriller never faded as the Super Over too ended in a tie, taking the game to yet another Super Over where the Rohit Sharma-led side edged past its opponent. Earlier, Rohit Sharma and Rinku Singh had stitched a breathtaking 190-run stand to help India post a mammoth total of 212 for 4 on the bouncy track of Bengaluru.

Rohit scored 121 not out off 69 while Rinku contributed with 69 not out off 39 after the India skipper won the toss and opted to bat. Afghanistan came out with a superb reply and managed to level the scores by the end, thanks to Gulbadin Naib's fighting 55 off 23. Skipper Rohit Sharma produced a marvelous, situation-defying

Indian team players celebrate after the team won the third T20 cricket match against Afghanistan in a super over. PHOTO: PTI

hundred, his fifth in T20Is, as India recovered from a top-order meltdown to post a massive 212 for 4 against Afghanistan in the third and final T20I here on Wednesday.

Rohit (121 not out, 69b, 11x4, 8x6) and his perfect sidekick Rinku Singh (69 n,o, 39b, 2x4, 6x6) shared 190 runs for a stellar, unbeaten fifth-wicket stand as India came back from a flaky 22 for four after opting to bat first.

The numbers might suggest a different story, but it was not one of Rohit's downright marauding knocks but he had to restrain himself for a good part of his stay because of the situation his team had dug itself in.

Even Rinku displayed his destructive instincts judiciously and that gradually-building crescendo was the trademark of their alliance. Rohit even had to bring out a rather rare shot from his arsenal, a reverse sweep to unsettle Afghan spinners.

A reverse sweep off leg-spinner Qais Ahmad fetched him a T20 fifty for the first time since October 2022. Of course, there were those inevitable and archetypal pulls too that make a Rohit innings such a compelling watch.

The Mumbaikar's on-one-leg pull-off pacer Mohammed Saleem who sailed into second tier was an astounding shot.

Soon, the fifty blossomed into a hundred off 63 balls, Rohit's first in T20I since his 111 against the West Indies at Lucknow in 2018, which came through a sliced boundary behind point off pacer Omarzai.

India: 212/4 in 20 overs (Rohit Sharma 121 not out, Rinku Singh 69 not out; Fareed Ahmad Malik 3/20).

Afghanistan: 212/6 in 20 overs (Ibrahim Zadran 50, Rahmanullah Gurbaz 50, Gulbadin Naib 55 not out; Washington Sundar 3/18).

—*PTI*

Ishpreet eases into s/fs, Laxman bows out

MUMBAI, 17 JAN

Mumbai's Ishpreet Singh Chadha, currently the lone Indian competing on the professional circuit, proved too good for Shoaib Khan as he recorded an authoritative 6-1 win in the best-of-11-frames quarter-finals at the All India Snooker Open here on Wednesday.The Delhi cueist started on a promising note and pocketed the opening frame to take the lead. But, that brought out the best from Ishpreet who stamped his class with a sterling performance.He showed good touch and accuracy with his shots to put together five sizeable breaks of 74, 78, 104, 88 and 85 and went on to chalk out a comprehensive 39-86, 79-8, 84-0, 104-0, 112-0, 108-30, and 85-50 win.

—*PTI*

Satwik-Chirag pair wins, Srikanth goes down in India Open opener

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Celebrated Indian shuttlers Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty advanced to the second round of the men's doubles event at the India Open Super 750 tournament but an erratic Kidambi Srikanth bowed out after a straight-game loss to Hong Kong's Lee Cheuk Yiu here on Wednesday. World No. 2 Satwik and Chirag, who had finished runner-up at Malaysia Super 1000 last week in Kuala Lumpur, eked out a 21-15 19-21 21-16 win over Fang-Chih Lee and Fang-Jen Lee of Chinese Taipei.

Satwiksairaj and Chirag PHOTO: PTI

Earlier, a flurry of brilliant shots was sandwiched between a series of unforced errors during the 47-minute opening round clash as Srikanth went down 22-24 13-21 to world no. 18 Lee.Srikanth made a good start in the opening game, playing some fine strokes from the backcourt to keep his nose ahead. But Lee kept breathing down his neck and slowly came back to the groove and, following a tight battle, moved ahead from 17-17 to grab three game points.

Srikanth managed to claw back at 20-20 before taking a one-point lead, but then, sprayed a shot wide, as Lee sealed the game with a crisp drop in the end.

—*PTI*

Finn Allen equals world record of hitting most sixes in a T20 match PHOTO: AFP

Pak vs NZ: Allen's record-breaking 137 seals the series

DUNEDIN, 17 JAN

A blizzard of sixes off Finn Allen's bat tumbled records in Dunedin, where his second T20I hundred deflated Pakistan and helped New Zealand pile on 224 for a comfortable 45-run win in the third T20I. For the third game in a row, New Zealand was put into bat; and for the third time in a row, Pakistan failed to chase down the score by relying on Babar Azam again, this time to lose the series which still has two games to go. New Zealand had been going hard with the bat all series, and Allen took it up a level on Wednesday by smashing 16 of their 18 sixes and recording the highest individual T20I score for the hosts by going past Brendon McCullum's 123 from the 2012 World Cup. Allen's 16 sixes are also the joint-highest in a T20I innings, which helped him sprint to a 26-ball fifty and then a 48-ball century. Pakistan also helped Allen by bowling too short even with the new ball, and the opening batter laid into their attack with his belligerent pulls and golf-like swings down the ground. In reply, only Mohammad Rizwan briefly gave Babar some support with his 24 but once he fell in the eighth over, no other Pakistan batter lasted more than 10 balls while Babar was out there. Babar fell for 58 while trying to up the scoring as the asking rate soared and Pakistan fell short again.

Allen had been going hard at the top earlier too, and with his highest T20 score, he already has 373 runs from five innings in the format this year. His assault started in the third over when he made the ball disappear beyond the square-leg boundary with consecutive sixes off Shaheen Afridi.

Haris Rauf would have thought he would have a good day when he dismissed Devon Conway in the next over that saw just two runs, but his second over - the last of the powerplay - was smashed for 28, with 27 of those coming off Allen's bat. Whether Rauf pitched it short or on a good length, Allen put them away for two fours and three sixes in the over to help New Zealand post 67 in the powerplay. Coming into the XI for this game, Mohammad Nawaz and Mohammad Wasim combined for two boundary-less overs after that, but Allen, who crossed 50 meanwhile, then charged against Nawaz for two sixes in the ninth over. Wasim and Zaman Khan managed to keep Allen quiet with a few yorkers and slower ones to pull the scoring rate under ten briefly, but Allen took off again once Rauf returned.

New Zealand 224 for 7 (Allen 137, Seifert 31, Rauf 2-60) beat Pakistan 179 for 7 (Babar 58, Southee 2-29, Santner 1-26) by 45 runs.

—*AP*

Djokovic, Sinner storms into 3rd round

MELBOURNE, 17 JAN

Novak Djokovic overcame a stern test from crowd-favorite Alexei Popyrin to make it to the third round of the Australian Open 2024 on January 17, Wednesday. Djokovic had dropped the second set and was on the back foot during the third one before mounting a great fightback.

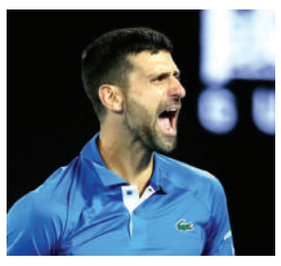
In an electrifying night session at the Australian Open, Novak Djokovic faced a formidable challenge from Australia's own Alexei Popyrin.

The defending champion, Djokovic, ultimately emerged victorious with a scoreline of 6-3, 4-6, 7-6(4), 6-3, advancing to the third round amidst the roaring support of the Melbourne crowd.

Jannik Sinner revved up his bid for a first Grand Slam title with a straight-sets cruise into the Australian Open third round on Wednesday.

The 22-year-old Italian fourth seed was on a different level from Dutch qualifier Jesper de Jong, racing through the match on Margaret Court Arena 6-2, 6-2, 6-2 in just 1 hour 43 minutes.

"He's a very good player,



Novak Djokovic PHOTO: AP

a young player and I'm sure he will play many more Grand Slam main draw matches," said Sinner of De Jong, gracious in victory.

He will next face either Argentine 26th seed Sebastian Baez or Colombia's unseeded Daniel Elahi Galan.

In a captivating clash at Margaret Court Arena, **Stefanos Tsitsipas** faced the relentless challenge of Jordan Thompson and a fervent home crowd during his second-round bout at the Australian Open. The 2023 finalist exhibited remarkable resilience, battling through a rollercoaster of emotions and momentum shifts to secure a hard-fought 4-6, 7-6(6), 6-2, 7-6(4) victory that kept his Grand Slam aspirations alive.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN 2024

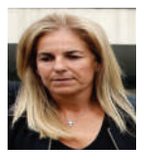
Jannik Sinner PHOTO: AP

Jannik Sinner PHOTO: AP

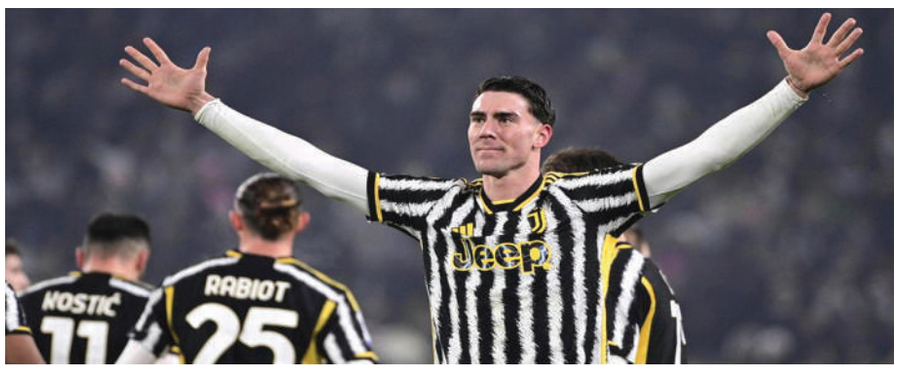
Reflecting on the intense encounter, Tsitsipas expressed the exhilaration of the moment: "The adrenaline and the rush that I got out of this match was insane tonight. You live for these kinds of matches."

Saving four set points at 5-6 in the fourth set showcased Tsitsipas' mental fortitude, as he navigated through the challenges posed by his Australian opponent. The pivotal turning point came in a tense second set, where Thompson had a 6/3 lead in the tie-break but faltered on three set points. Former Spanish tennis star Arantxa Sanchez Vicario has been given a suspended jail term for fraud, a court in Barcelona said on Wednesday.

Sanchez Vicario, 52, and her Former Spanish tennis star Arantxa Sanchez Vicario has been given a suspended jail term for fraud, a court in Barcelona said on Wednesday. husband Josep Santacana, and three other people were convicted by the criminal court of hiding assets to avoid paying a 7.6 million-euro ($8.27 million) debt to Banque de Luxembourg, including interest. —*AP*



Sanchez Vicario PHOTO: AP



Juventus' Dusan Vlahovic, front, celebrates after scoring his side's second goal PHOTO:AP

Dusan Vlahovic brace pushes Juventus two points behind leaders Inter Milan

MILAN, 17 JAN

Dusan Vlahovic shot Juventus to within two points of Serie A leaders Inter Milan with a stunning double in Tuesday's 3-0 win over Sassuolo. Serbia striker Vlahovic struck twice from distance in the first half at the Allianz Stadium in Turin to help Juve to their sixth straight win in all competitions and keep the pressure on fierce rivals Inter. "We try to prepare every match as if it were our last... we're happy with the win, let's hope we can keep going," said Vlahovic to DAZN.

The 23-year-old put the hosts ahead in the 15th minute when left all alone near the edge of the penalty area, from where his dipping shot flew past Sassuolo goalkeeper Andrea Consigli.

And he took his league tally to nine eight minutes before the break with a fabulous free-kick which again left Consigli grasping at thin air.

Juve again didn't put in a particularly impressive display but Sassuolo didn't create enough and Federico Chiesa made sure of the points in the 89th minute when he bundled home his sixth goal of the season.

Chiesa has again struggled with injuries this season and returned from a knee problem just before the hour mark in place of young gun Kenan Yildiz.

"I'm pleased Federico scored, he deserved it. We've known each other a long time and we're good friends, the goal will help him," added Vlahovic.

"But who scores is not important, it's that we win matches."

Juve can now claim the top spot at the weekend as they travel to Lecce on Sunday while Inter contests the revamped, four-team Italian Super Cup in Riyadh.

—*AP*

TOUGH MATCH

After fighting against Australia, India gear up for Uzbekistan

- After a gritty performance against formidable Australia, India face Uzbekistan in their second group match of the Asian Cup here on Thursday, aiming to assert themselves better than what they managed in the opening game.

AL RAYYAN, 17 JAN

After a gritty performance against formidable Australia, India face Uzbekistan in their second group match of the Asian Cup here on Thursday, aiming to assert themselves better than what they managed in the opening game.

India lost to title-contenders Australia 0-2 in the opening match on January 14 after denying the Socceroos any success for 50 minutes. The Australians were at their attacking best but Sunil Chhetri's men managed to avoid a bigger margin of defeat.

The defensive compactness, especially in the first half, would be something that the Indians would like to continue against the Uzbeks, who are a bit disappointed after playing out a 0-0 draw against Syria in their opening match.

"Uzbekistan are not Australia, but they're a good side nonetheless. So, it will be a big challenge in this game too," said Chhetri who missed a scoring chance against Australia.

Chhetri had earlier conceded that Uzbekistan as well as Australia are of World Cup level but he and his team will not be too scared of the former, popularly known as 'White Wolves', after their fighting show against the Socceroos.

Sunil Chhetri during the India vs Australia match PHOTO: AIFF

For sure, India will not sit back too deep against Uzbekistan. Instead, they would look to play their own game and press for counter-attacks with quick transitions. The likes of Chhetri, Manvir Singh and other forwards could be looking for chances which were almost non-existent against the Australians.

He soldiered on with a bandaged forehead and stitched-up cuts above each eyebrow. Uzbekistan is a side who have beaten the likes of China, Oman and Bolivia while drawing with Iran and Mexico in the past year. They are currently at ninth spot among the Asian countries in the FIFA rankings. Uzbek captain Jaloliddin Masharipov, who plies his trade in the Greek Super League, was Uzbekistan's most impressive player in the match against Syria and he could be the man to watch for the Indians. Historically, India and Uzbekistan have played eight times against each other with the Blue Tigers having won just one. Uzbekistan were the victor five times while two matches had ended in draws.

The last match between the two sides had also gone in favour of the Uzbeks who won 2-1 in the 2001 Merdeka Cup in Kuala Lumpur.

The 'White Wolves' have not lost to India in their six earlier meetings. They erased a 2-1 deficit with two goals in the final 13 minutes to win their only Asian Cup qualification round match 3-2 in 1999.

—*PTI*